

A photograph of Peter Frampton, a bald man with a goatee, smiling and sitting on a brown guitar case. He is wearing a dark blue blazer over a grey t-shirt and blue jeans. He is holding a black electric guitar with gold hardware. The background is a grey, textured wall. To the right, there is a wooden floor, a red and white striped cloth draped over the guitar case, and a rack of other guitars.

On Stage

Peter Frampton

by Glenn R. Swift

HIS GUITAR STILL ROCKS

Now that his gloriously golden shoulder length curls are gone forever, British guitar god Peter Frampton finally looks like one of us. In fact, he now looks exactly like most of his male fans – bespectacled, thrilled to be here, but wondering where the time went. In Frampton’s case that’s a high compliment.

In his fifth decade of wowing audiences with a vengeance, the onetime pop pin-up still rips his strings like a teenager, reminding one and all that his first rise to fame in the United States was based upon his blistering but lyrical guitar playing, not his looks. While he’s become fodder for *True Hollywood Tales* and other cable biography weepers (his is a textbook case of a career sabotaged by horrendous management decisions,) the bottom line shall always be that to see Frampton live is to hear as good a guitar player as has ever strode the boards – a man whose blend of heavy and sweet solos always surprises and exhilarates.

As to how his musical career began, fate clearly played a role.

“I was seven years-old and stumbled onto a strange looking box in our attic while helping my dad get some suitcases down in anticipation of an upcoming summer vacation. I asked my father what was in it and he said, ‘Your grandmother’s banjolele.’”

The young lad didn’t even know what a banjolele was, but made a fortuitous decision on the spot. With his eyes tantalizingly focused on the dusty case, the seven-year old Frampton said to his dad:

“Let’s have a look.”

As soon as young Peter opened the box a love affair with music began.

“My father showed me a few chords and I began playing the thing for hours on end.”

A year later, the superstar to be convinced his dad to buy him a guitar.

“He agreed, but only if I promised to take lessons from a classical guitarist. ‘If you’re going to play this thing, you should learn to play it correctly,’ he said. Well... I absolute-

ly hated the lessons. I wanted to play this new music that had just come out – rock n’ roll,” laughed Frampton.

Needless to say, his thoughts about those days have changed.

“Looking back, it was the best thing that could have happened to me. I learned all the correct hand positions and about music structurally. Most of all, I learned to play by ear. I would never be where I am today if I hadn’t taken those classical lessons,” said Frampton whose childhood friend and schoolmate was none other than David Bowie.

“David and I both loved the same kind of blues-based music, but he was three years older than me, and at that age, it might as well have been thirty,” joked Frampton.

At the ripe old age of 10, Frampton began playing in his first band, The Little Ravens. Four years later, Frampton’s dexterity on guitar caught the attention of Bill Wyman of the Rolling Stones, who produced and managed a new band for the aspiring young star, The Preachers.

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“When I was 16, I joined The Herd. We had several hit singles and a couple successful albums, which really helped to get me connected into the London music scene,” said Frampton who in 1968 was named “The Face of 1968” by the UK press.

But the media hype became a source of resentment among some band members and The Herd split after seeing Frampton’s face on the cover of what seemed to be an endless stream of teeny bopper magazines. Undaunted, Frampton joined forces with a young singer and actor named Steve Marriott of the Small Faces. From this marriage was born the legendary band Humble Pie.

Well before the legendary live album that placed him in the history books, Humble Pie’s scorching double set from the Fillmore East, *Performance*, was the LP a generation of concertgoers played until the grooves went flat. Frampton’s lead guitar work matched Marriott’s soulful voice and blustery showmanship and created a live powerhouse few bands of the day could match. Part of the reason Humble Pie became headliners in the U.S. was because very few acts wanted the group to open for them – a hard act to follow indeed.

Though Humble Pie became huge on the Stateside concert circuit, known for their explosively raw shows that mixed rock, blues and gospel, Frampton moved on yet again to the temptations of a solo career. Though critically acclaimed, his studio albums made little impression on either side of the Atlantic, but a decision to quickly record a live album to fulfill a contract obligation turned Frampton from a journeyman rocker a bit short on cash to a world-class star.

Within months of the release of *Frampton Comes Alive* in 1976, he was the single biggest concert act in North America, and, by the end of the year, the double disc had become the biggest selling live album in the history of the recording industry – a title it still holds today with the added sales of a digitally remastered CD in recent years.

Many of us remember the rest of the story – a horrendously lame follow-up album with an embarrassing boy-toy cover combined with a “starring” role in the abominably awful film version of *Sgt. Pepper*. Both contributed to the homogenization and smoothing of Frampton’s signature rough edges. Seemingly overnight, the man who just a few years earlier had been shredding eardrums with real rock had been transformed into a sugary imitation of himself.

But Frampton has risen from the ashes in the past decade. Gone are all the trappings of pop stardom. In their place: the guitar, the voice, the energy... and all those great songs. Frampton has been on a seemingly endless tour of every gritty rock venue here and across Europe and has regained his core rocker audience, while drawing a new generation bent on hearing guitar the way it’s supposed to be played. The *Cincinnati Post* reviewed a recent concert by saying:

“It was Frampton’s night, showing why he took rock arenas by storm in the 70s. He’s as sizzling a guitarist as ever and showed his voice as still surprisingly strong... Set ending song ‘Do You Feel Like We Do’ was thunderous and mind-numbing.”

Not content to rest on his laurels, Frampton released yet another critically acclaimed album with the release of *Fingerprints* in 2006. The CD is made up of searing instrumentals backed by the Rolling Stones’ Charlie Watts on drums and Bill Wyman on bass, along with Pearl Jam veterans Mike McReady and Matt Cameron.

Frampton looks forward to releasing a new CD, but balked at setting a timetable for its release.

“It will probably take longer than the record company wants,” he laughed. **PBG**

Featuring a mix of his new work and all the classic hits from his landmark live album (plus a Humble Pie surprise or two), Peter Frampton will take the stage at the Kravis Center in West Palm Beach on Saturday, October 25 at 8pm. Don’t miss out on what will be a memorable performance by one of rock music’s greatest superstars. For tickets or more information, call (561) 832-7469 or visit www.kravis.org.

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