

TRAIN

By Tamela Meredith Partridge
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All Aboard ! Grab your ticket and catch a ride with Train, the soulful rock band from San Francisco, as they roll down the Illinois tracks and arrive right on schedule in Rockford for their September 3rd "On The Waterfront" concert at the Miller Lite Great Lawn Stage.

"The very first concert I ever attended when I was kid was at the Rockford Speedway back in '79," said Train member Jimmy Stafford, a Morris, IL. native. "The line-up was Cheap Trick, AC/DC, Molly Hatchet and the Baby's. We had spent the night there, in the rain and mud, but we ended up getting in the first row. It was just the best concert. So, when I noticed in our schedule that we were going to be playing in Rockford in September, I kind of got a little sentimental about it all. Because, who knows, maybe Train performing in Rockford will be able to become a part of someone else's first concert experience memories as well."

Train, a quintet comprised of Patrick Monahan (lead vocals/percussion), Rob Hotchkiss (vocals/guitar), Jimmy Stafford (lead guitar), Charlie Colin (bass) and Scott Underwood (drums), have been rocking venues across the nation with their strong, honest songwriting, great musicianship and straightforward approach to music.

"We all write the music and Patrick, who writes all the lyrics, just never seems to be at a loss for words," Jimmy said. "We will give Patrick a piece of music and the very next day he will come in with some great words. We have so much material coming all the time that I can just never see us using anybody else's material. Even if one member might get in a rut, there are still four other guys throwing music out there. So, we have been really blessed in the songwriting area."

Train was originally created in '94 when Rob, a former lead singer of the Los Angeles band, The Apostles, formed a duo with Patrick and began performing various gigs and cafes in the San Francisco Bay area. The pair eventually expanded into a five-member band by recruiting Jimmy and Charlie (Rob's two former Apostles bandmates) and completed the line-up by adding Charlie's friend, Scott Underwood.



"Train was just a name that Rob thought was good name," Jimmy said. "It was just a strong, passionate, one-word name that seemed too good of a name to not have been used before. I can remember thinking, back when Rob first called me down in Los Angeles and asked if I wanted to come join the band, "Hmmm. Train ? Do I really want to be in a band called Train ? I don't know." But, I believed in Rob's talent, because I had played in bands with him in the past. So, I moved up to San Francisco and became a part of this train. And the same thing happened with the other members. We all just kind of grew into this band called Train. And it works."

Since the release of their near double-platinum '98 *Aware*/Columbia Records debut album, "Train," the group has toured non-stop promoting its three chart-topping singles, "Free," "Meet Virginia," and "I Am."

"What makes the success of "Train" even sweeter for us is the fact that we had initially recorded the album on our own," Jimmy said. "Columbia Records had passed on the band in the very beginning. So, we took matters into our own hands by borrowing some money from our parents and made the whole album for \$25,000. Which, by today's standards, is really cheap. When Columbia heard our finished album, they eventually signed the band and released the album as is. So, for this little record that we made, to have it do as well as it has, is just really special to us. We thought the record would sell maybe a few thousand copies and get our name known out there a little bit. We had no idea that it would take off like it did."

After three years of solid touring, Train has temporarily pulled into the depot and is taking some well-deserved time off this summer in preparation of coming back, full steam-ahead this fall to promote the release of sophomore album, "Something More."

"This second album shows a deeper, more mature Train," Jimmy said. "There are still some mandolins and harmonica in the rootsy sound and there are still a couple of quirky songs, just like the first album. Because of the success of the first album, we were able to afford a great seasoned producer that knew how to capture our sound and take this band to the next level. And I think it shows in the songwriting. We are just better, more mature songwriters than we were when we wrote the first record."

The only thing greater than Train's recording success is the huge global fan base they have accumulated along the way.

"We spend hours each day answering fan mail that comes in through the e-mail on our www.trainline.com website," Jimmy said, who updates the "On The Road" section of the website. "Music is the universal language. We get letters from all over the world from people who don't even speak English. But they love the music. Which is pretty great. So, we kind of look upon all this as a sharing adventure, as if we are simply the messengers of this music. Because, without people buying our music and coming to see our concerts, we would not be where we are at and we not be able to continue doing what we are doing. To be able to share our music and be on the giving end of all this really makes it a reciprocal thing we really respect."