

MUSICIAN



PETER FRAMPTON

The master guitarist revisits the album that made him a rock icon

By Eric R. Danton

FRAMPTON COMES ALIVE! HAS DEFINED PETER FRAMPTON'S career. Only his perspective has shifted—from surprise and frustration to acceptance. The result is *FCA! 35 Tour: An Evening With Peter Frampton*, a two-DVD set that captures a tour celebrating the 35th anniversary of one of the most iconic live albums ever released.

The double LP was Frampton's breakthrough album, though it wasn't his first. The singer and ace guitarist co-founded Humble Pie when he was 18, played on albums by Harry Nilsson and George Harrison, and even made the short list to replace Mick Taylor in the Rolling Stones. Frampton had also released four solo albums to mediocre commercial success before *Frampton Comes Alive!* rocketed him to stardom. The record was the best-selling release of 1976, but its runaway success created an impossible standard for the musician to live up to.

And he tried. Frampton has released 10 studio albums since 1976, attracting a small but loyal fan base that has followed him through each new turn in his career, including a period he spent trying to duplicate the success of *Frampton Comes Alive!* "I went through a phase of thinking one had to pander to one's audience," says Frampton, "which was so wrong. But after the huge success of *Comes Alive*, I was lost about what to do next. It was just too much."

Frampton eventually made peace with the album's monstrous success. "If that's the record I'm remembered for, I'm fine with that, for all sorts of reasons," he says. That acceptance turned into more, prompting last year's 35th anniversary tour. Taking the show on the road was an opportunity for Frampton to reconnect with fans who had loved the original album, and to showcase the wealth of material he had recorded since.



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What's your relationship with the album now?

There was a fear factor that kicked in when the thing got so damned big that it didn't matter who you were or how clever or talented you were, you just weren't going to follow it up. I did fine—but everyone thought the next one, *I'm in You*, was a failure because it only sold 3 million. It's something that I grew to appreciate for what it is. It went from being an albatross to something that I'm very at peace with and proud of. Look, the day that Frampton drops dead, the first sentence is going to be: "Peter Frampton, who was most famous for his album *Frampton Comes Alive!* ..." There's no getting away from it, no matter what I do.

Any expectations for the new edition?

I think the best thing is not to have expectations about anything these days, because it's such a changing business. As long as they press enough for my family and animals, I'm fine. I never really thought

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I'd revisit the *Comes Alive* tour. I haven't played those numbers in that order in one show since 1976.

What made you decide to do it?

I could see the attraction for the audience—for those who were there, those who missed the tour at the time, and those who have become fans since. But once we started rehearsing, I started getting excited, because the band got excited. By the first show, we walked in to a packed house in New Jersey and the place erupted in what seemed to be déjà vu for me. At that moment it all seemed worthwhile.

What was the best part of it?

I realized I had a captive audience, and in the longest show I'll ever do in my life, we said, "OK, now we'll catch you up." For those who haven't been to the shows recently or bought the albums, I've been active. There's a lot of material. I've had a long career. So basically we did an hour and 20 minutes of encores. It was very successful, and the most fulfilling part for me was giving them what

they wanted, but also to do stuff from, say, *Fingerprints*, that had nothing whatsoever to do with *Frampton Comes Alive!*

How long did it take to escape the long shadow of *Frampton Comes Alive!*?

Thirty-seven years. I'm coming out of it next year. The '80s were a difficult period for me. It wasn't until my dear friend David Bowie got me out on the road for the *Glass Spider* tour and on his *Never Let Me Down* record and reintroduced me as a guitar player around the world. I can never thank him enough for believing in me, and seeing past the image of the satin pants and big hair to the guitar player he first met when we played together in school. Then I started working with Steve Marriott again. After that, I sort of shelved the solo career in the early '90s.

What brought you back?

I missed playing. I enjoyed touring with David so much I just wanted to go back out and play, because I hadn't really played out that much in the '80s. So come '92, I called friends who had been with me in the last band, and said, "Let's go and play. Let's do six weeks of clubs and have fun." Six weeks turned into six months.

How important has a sense of humor been to your survival over the years?

I was brought up in very down-to-earth family, and you never took yourself too seriously. When *Comes Alive* hit, I was a diva for like three weeks, and then my family ridiculed me and brought me back down. That's about it. We're all the same, we just do different things for a living. I don't put myself on a pedestal. That's for other people to do, and sometimes it's a drag—but it does get you good seating in restaurants.

Did you write "Show Me the Way" and "Baby I Love Your Way" on the same day?

True story. It's part of my "ways" series: "Show Me the Way," "Baby I Love Your Way." I was in the Bahamas for three weeks to write the *Frampton* album between tours, and I borrowed Steve Marriott's cottage on the beach. For the first two weeks I had nothing happening whatsoever. I brought a few guitars, an electric and an acoustic, and I was getting a little panicky. I wrote "Show Me the Way," the verse and the chorus, before lunch, and decided that was the first thing I felt really good about. I quit after the first verse and the chorus, had a swim, some lunch, and was starting to write the second verse when I thought, "Hmm, I think I'll try to write something else, I think I just might be on a roll."

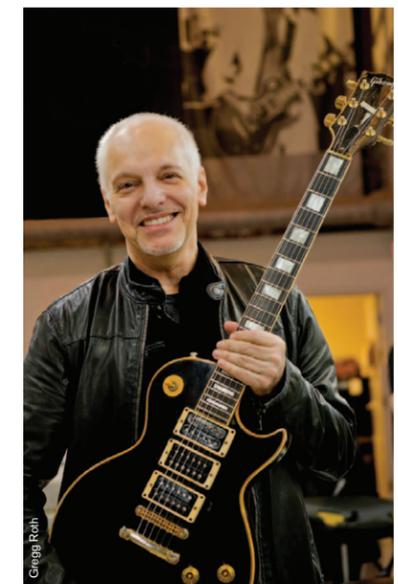
TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Peter Frampton thought he had lost his six-string soul mate—a 1954 Gibson Les Paul—in a tragic accident when the cargo plane carrying the guitar crashed on takeoff in Venezuela in 1980. But someone saved it—and the guitar spent three decades in the hands of a musician on the island of Curaçao before Frampton got the instrument back last year. "Obviously having got my Les Paul back, the original, that is an amazing thing to be able to play again," says Frampton.

He made do in the intervening years, nurturing a passion for Gibson ES-335s. "I have a '64 red one, and I also have a '59 red one, which is the year before they started making them," he says. "But it's definitely a '59, so they must have been experimenting."

One of Frampton's earliest guitar influences was Hank Marvin of the Shadows, who played a Fender Stratocaster—a rarity in England at the time. "Up until the late '50s, there was an embargo on American instrument imports, and that's why we all played Hofners and stuff from Japan," says Frampton. Marvin and his Fiesta Red 1958 Strat captured Frampton's imagination, and he eventually commissioned a similar instrument.

"I found out who made Hank's Strat, and it was a combination of the U.S. custom Fender shop and the U.K. custom Fender shop," Frampton says. "It's got a special



tremolo arm on it, and when I play it, I sound like the Shadows. It's something I always wanted to have."

MUSICIAN



Onstage in Florida, 2006

'If Frampton Comes Alive! is the record I'm remembered for, I'm fine with that.'

Describe your evolution as a songwriter. When I first started, I didn't know what I was doing, and that's the best way, not to have any rules. I didn't know you had to have a reintroduction before the next verse. Does there have to be a chorus? If you listen to my first solo record, I don't think the opening track, "Fig Tree Bay," has a chorus. It's just a song. You can find hooky parts in it, and I think it's a very hooky song, but it doesn't really have a chorus. Sometimes, too much information when you've been schooled by others is restricting because you think, "Well, I've got to follow this format now." When I would write with other people, I would see that they would have a format, and I don't like formats.

You're writing for the Cincinnati Ballet. It's a stretch, and nerve-wracking, but I think it's good to be a little scared. It pushes you. I'm loving the process. They had done a pas de deux to some of my music from *Fingerprints*, and they sent me a DVD. I was just blown away with the choreography and dancing. I thanked them, and the head of the Cincinnati Ballet called to say they'd like to have me onstage playing while the ballet danced. They wanted three 20-minute sections. I said, "Why don't we start off with some older music, and end up with some chestnuts. But how about the middle 20 minutes be brand-new music that I'll write from scratch?" They loved that, and that's what I'm in the middle of doing right now.

MOON OVER CONNECTICUT

The date was July 1, 1976—a few months after *Frampton Comes Alive!* was released—and Peter Frampton was headlining a show at Colt Park in Hartford, Conn., when he took a tumble off the stage. "We went from all daytime shows with a white stage to our first night show, and they hadn't put a white line on the front of the stage," Frampton recalls. "Plus, we didn't have a sound check, we didn't do them in those days. Then when I ran out all the Super Trouper spotlights hit me and blinded me. I literally didn't realize where the front of the stage was, and ran off the front." But the incident wasn't exactly over. "I landed on the crash barrier," he continues. "I turned around, put my foot on the stage while my manager's brother gave me his hand. As I pulled myself up, my satin pants split from seam to seam—and I mooned 30,000 people." After the memorable entrance, Frampton played the rest of the show without incident.

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