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# A NIGHT OF ROCK 'N ROLL FANTASY. . .

## WITH PAUL RODGERS & BAND

By: Bonnie S. Mason

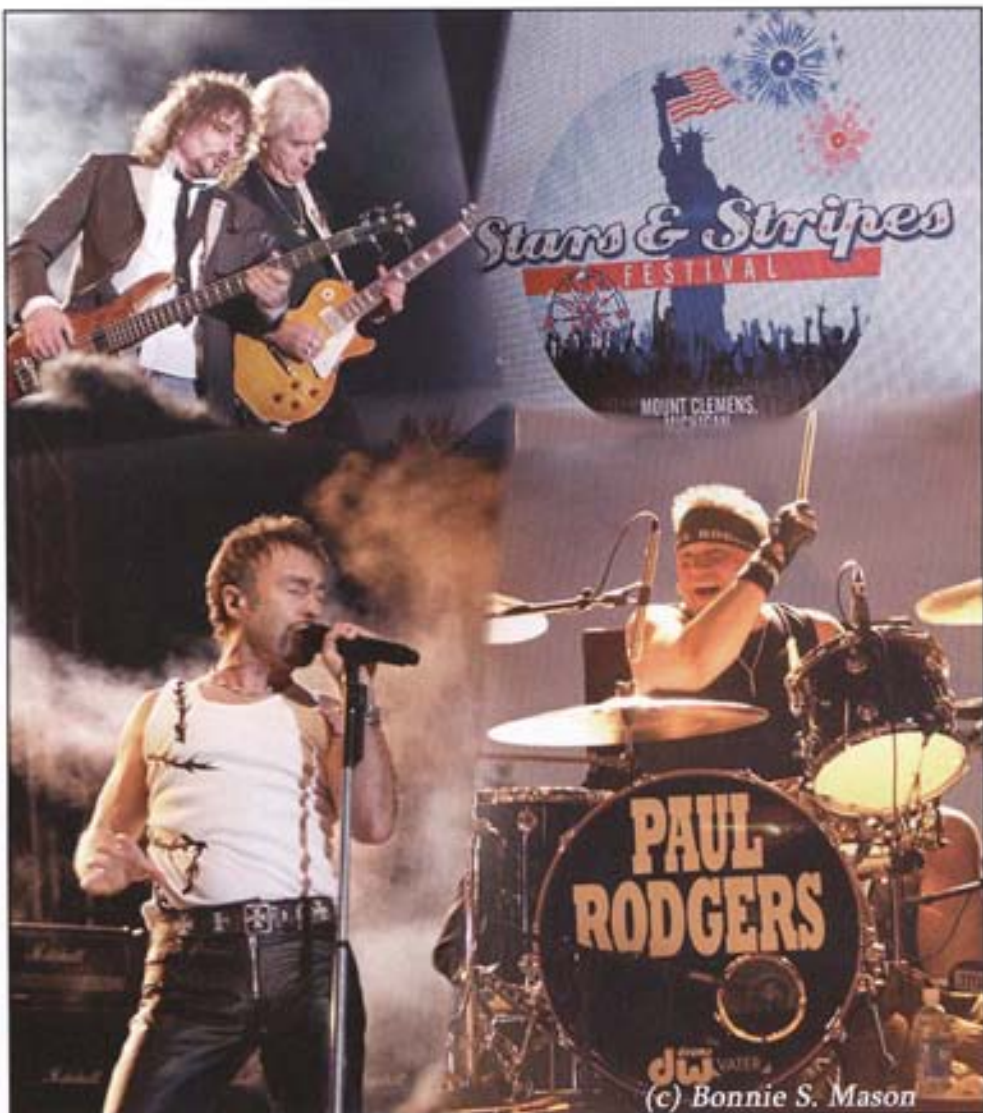
On a cool summer evening in late June I found myself in the heart of Detroit, Michigan at the Mt. Clemens "Stars and Stripes" Festival. This is the kind of festival where concert-goers bring folding chairs to sit back and enjoy the ambiance, sights and sounds of summer, anticipating a night of good rock and roll music. Nearby were carnival rides and a plethora of food vendors. It was a friendly and happy atmosphere packed with people. On this beautiful evening a very large crowd had formed around the stage giving barely enough room to move around. Culminating this popular event hailed the outstanding Paul Rodgers and his band.

Amidst the sunseting backdrop, Paul Rodgers and his three band members opened the show with the 1978 Bad Company hit, "Rock & Roll Fantasy" ...

*"Hey! Yeah! Here come the jesters 1-2-3, it's all part of my fantasy. I love the music, and I love to see the crowd. Dancing in the aisles, and singing out loud, yeah" ...*

What an opening! This immediately brought everyone to their feet, quickly turning the folding chairs into ground cover. The band was in excellent form, looking energized and well-rehearsed while the crowd fed off of their enthusiasm. Another Bad Company classic followed, "Good Lovin' Gone Bad". Paul's voice is as strong as ever, in tune, and reaching a broad range. Walking on stage with mic stand in hand, he moved about the stage, rarely standing still, twirling and lifting the stand just as he did over 30 years ago.

His impressive three-piece band consisted of powerhouse drummer Jeff Kathan, bassist Lynn Sorensen, and former Heart guitarist, Howard Leese. Jeff and Lynn, both from the Seattle area,



have been playing together for seven years, giving the band a tight rhythm section. Lynn ran around the stage like he was on fire, ripping out the deepest lows and clearest highs. He was a true talent to watch! Howard's resume speaks for itself. A true professional and amazing guitarist, he appeared to jam out the most difficult riffs and solos almost effortlessly. Looking so cool and confident on stage, I don't believe he ever broke out in a sweat!

Jeff Kathan played with such intensity and raw emotion as he watched Paul's every move. At 6'4", and 250 lbs, he gives a powerful visual presence on stage, matched by a strong and confident sound, having just the right power and timing to bring those classic songs to life.

Next, was "Running with the Pack", where Rodgers sang his heart out from behind the baby grand piano. The next two songs, "Smile", a remake of "See

You Smile", from his days with the Maytals, and "Louisiana Blues", from Paul's Muddy Waters tribute album changed the pace, followed by Free's "The Stealer".

The 1975 Bad Company hit off their second album, "Feel Like Making Love" was next on the list. The audience cheered and clapped as the opening revealed this classic hit. A very animated Paul Rodgers sang with emotion throughout as he often held out his arms, pointed to women, and threw out kisses. The Firm song, "Satisfaction Guaranteed" was next. "Little Wing" by Jimi Hendrix followed, and I believe Jimi would have been smiling in heaven that night! After that soulful performance, "Wishing Well" off Free's last album, Heartbreaker (1973) was performed. Another Bad Company classic "Shooting Star" then followed.

Throughout the show, Paul invited the audience to join in and sing along, holding his microphone stand out over the audience... they obliged with great enthusiasm. He was pleased with the response and thanked them all. Who wouldn't know the words to all those classic tunes?

After "Can't Get Enough", they left the stage, only to return a few moments later with "Saving Grace", and the Free classic, "All Right Now". Leaving the stage a second time, they returned once again to end the night with "Ready for Love" and the infamous "Bad Company", with Rodgers on the piano again... it was an amazing live version!

After the show, a special visitor from the audience appeared backstage to see Paul. It was Charlie Martin, original drummer with Bob Seger and The Silver Bullet Band. Injured in a tragic accident over 30 years ago, and now confined to a wheelchair, he had asked to see Paul. Paul came out to see him, and they chatted for a long time. They then sang together for a few moments. It was indeed heart-warming to see the mutual respect between these two musicians.

In addition to touring, Paul Rodgers oversees his website which has a very

unique, and possibly unprecedented feature. He runs contests throughout the year for his fans which yield cash prizes, concert trips, concert tickets, airfare, hotel accommodations, plus autographed DVDs, CDs, programs, books, hats, t-shirts, totalling \$30,000 in value this year. He feels that his fans have given so much to his career over the years, that he wants to give back to the fans... and what better way than this! You can sign up at [www.paulrogers.com](http://www.paulrogers.com).

## ONE ON ONE WITH JEFF KATHAN

**Bonnie S. Mason:** How long have you been with Paul Rodgers?

**Jeff Kathan:** Approximately 10 years. I started playing for Paul in 1998. Except for a short hiatus during the European tour in 2006, I have been the exclusive drummer for Paul Rodgers' solo band. On the average we tour 40-50 shows a year, unless Paul is out on other adventures such as the Bad Company tour, and the Queen tour.

**BM:** How did you get the gig?

**JK:** In 1997, Paul was in Vancouver. His new manager, Chris Crawford had an

acquaintance who told him about this really good drummer. Paul said, "We'll see how it goes". Well, here I am today, and the band is the best it's ever been!

**BM:** What is your favorite Paul Rodgers song to play?

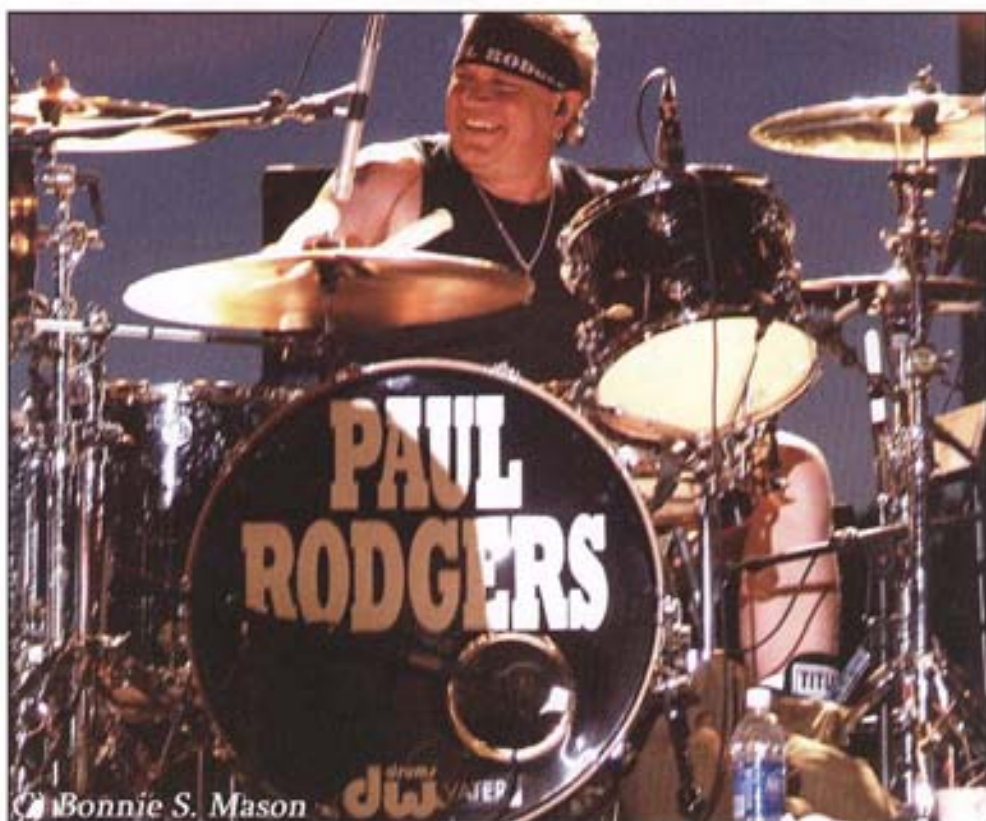
**JK:** That's a tough question. My favorite Free song would be "Fire and Water", and my two favorite Bad Company songs, are "Ready for Love", then "Bad Company", and by The Firm, definitely "Satisfaction Guaranteed".

**BM:** At 6' 4" and 250 lbs, you have been referred to as a powerhouse drummer. You have a solid build and appear to be in good physical condition. Do you workout regularly?

**JK:** Absolutely, all of the time. At my age you need to be in as good shape as possible. I hit the weights, run three miles a day, and swim regularly.

**BM:** Besides music, do you have any other interests or occupations?

**JK:** I teach drums. I have students of all ages ranging 14 to 60 years old. I love to watch people grow in their skill. I tell them if you want to be a drummer you need to understand what it is about keeping time, it's something that you can learn even if you aren't a natural at



Bonnie S. Mason

it. In addition, I also own a successful carpet cleaning business, and have my Real Estate License.

**BM:** You're drumming influences were Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, John Bonham, Don Brewer, among others. How did you become interested in the drums?

**JK:** When I was 8 years old, my grandfather played the first record album I ever heard, and he said to me, "Listen to this drummer". It was Gene Krupa. Since I looked up to my grandfather so much, I thought this must be something special. I got hooked and started taking lessons. I then played drums in the band in Junior High and High School. The rest is history.

Other drummers who have influenced me are Mike Derosier, mentor and teacher, and a very good friend, Joe Vitale, a great drummer. There are so many... Liberty DeVitto, Phil Ehart of Kansas, Carmine Appice, Neal Smith of Alice Cooper, David Garibaldi of Tower of Power, Kenny Aronoff, Chris Slade of the Firm, and many more; all have inspired me. I have met most of them at the NAMM show, and at concerts playing with Paul. I am proud to shake their hands. I've found that musicians in general are drawn to Paul Rodgers. Because of this, I've met other musicians who have either played on tour with us, or come to the shows to see Paul. Musicians such as Joe Walsh, Ronnie Montrose, Sammy Hager, Buck Dharma, Eric Bloom, and Jason Bonham. I honestly can say that 99% of everyone I have looked up to, musicians and drummers alike, have been great people, really cool regular guys, cordial, nice, and respectful... class acts. They are also very approachable, and always glad to talk with you.

**BM:** Simon Kirke is a legend, and an amazing drummer who recorded much of the music you play. What would you like to say about Simon?

**JK:** He is a great drummer. He was the right guy for the job. He can play slow, like nobody can play, and has an uncanny ability to hold that slow groove, as Paul Rodgers would say. I saw BC the first time they ever played Seattle in '75 or '76, and I thought they

were fantastic. Now, there is this amazing turn of events and here I am playing the same music so many years later.

**BM:** You also play in local Seattle bands when not on tour. How many bands are you currently affiliated with?

**JK:** Five bands. In addition to Paul Rodgers, I actively play in four local bands here in Seattle; "Magic Bus", a retro rock and roll band with Go-Go

***When I was 8 years old, my grandfather played the first record album I ever heard, and he said to me, "Listen to this drummer". It was Gene Krupa.***

dancers, "Sex & Violins" featuring "rock violin" and all original music, "Fabulous Johnsons" with cover tunes such as Montrose, Led Zeppelin, acoustic versions of songs, etc., and "Spike and the Impalers" an 11 piece band that plays classic rock/British invasion cover tunes. Lynn Sorensen, bassist for Paul Rodgers also plays in these bands with me.

**BM:** Are you currently in the studio working on any projects?

**JK:** Yes, several projects. With "Sex & Violins", we had an 18 year old guitar player named Ian Crawford from "Spike and the Impalers", and Lynn Sorensen on vocals, bass, and violin. We started out by doing some movie soundtrack material in the studio, and it eventually turned into 19 tracks. Lynn has been putting the lyrics and vocals together. Ten songs are finished, and being mixed but not mastered yet. We anticipate it will be finished in approximately six months. I also recorded numerous songs with "Spike and the Impalers", and finally, Howard Leese is releasing his first solo cd soon. Lynn Sorensen and myself are also on that cd.

**BM:** I was told that you do your own setup and tuning? Not very many national tour drummers do that. Is this true?

**JK:** With Paul Rodgers, I do have a drum tech now, and have had one for quite a while, because since we are backlining almost exclusively, I can't use my own drums. I order what I want,

and then he tunes them ballparked. I get to the stage early before everyone else to fine tune it perfectly. In fact, I have been known to travel with the stage crew when it looks like the band may miss sound check, and I do a preliminary sound check for everyone.

**BM:** I noticed that you use a cross-over technique while drumming. Does this improve the sound, or is it strictly for show?

**JK:** No, it's not for show at all. It actually makes it sound like I am playing multiple toms, but I do like the way it looks. John Bonham, Buddy Rich... all of my early mentors used this old school technique.

**BM:** On stage, how do you and Paul communicate?

**JK:** I'm watching Paul all of the time. He's always giving me signals, and I watch his hands constantly. He controls the show.

**BM:** There seems to be a pleasant atmosphere among band members. You all seem to get along well.

**JK:** Yes, we get along great; we are a band of brothers. We work as a team, you check your ego at the door. Howard Leese, former Heart guitarist, is the best musician that I have ever played with. He has made me a better musician. Lynn is an incredible bass player and an all around musician and vocalist as well. We have been playing together for about seven years, and have a natural bond. Also, this year we added Kurtis Dengler, an 18 year old guitarist, who is very cool, and has a great career ahead of him.

**BM:** Since you only do a handful of shows per month and live far apart, is there any rehearsal time?

**JK:** Very little. Howard lives in Malibu, Paul in Vancouver, and Lynn and I are in Seattle. If we are going to learn a new song, we usually get one or two practices in before the show. For example, at

a recent show in Milwaukee, a fan requested a song at sound check which happened to be the first song Paul ever wrote, Free's "Walk in my Shadow". Back at the hotel, Howard called me and told me Paul would like to play that song tonight. We all listened to a live version of it a couple of times, and then we listened to it with Paul, and talked it through. We played it that same night as the first encore, and nailed it! It felt great!

**BM:** How did you feel about the Mt. Clemens show?

**JK:** Mt. Clemens, Michigan... great show, really great. The band played very well. The show the night before had several technical problems, and so we needed a good show, and everyone was on. You never know what to expect with rental gear. Another thing I remember about the Mt. Clemens show; there was a full moon that night facing the stage, above the audience. It reminded me of what Paul once told me about the night he sang and recorded "Bad Company" many years ago. The setting was outside on the top of a castle, under a full moon. So on this particular night in Michigan during that

song, Paul glanced my way as he looked up to the full moon and smiled.

**BM:** Is there anything you'd like to say to your fans?

**JK:** I have a lot of friends and musicians alike I've met through the years whom I'd like to thank. My wife and children for their love and support. I could not have kept my dreams alive without that support as it has not been easy, to say the least. I'm glad that I am appreciated and it warms my heart to be appreciated for doing what I do. I am honored when someone asks me for my autograph young or old. I am a blue collar kind of guy, and am very humble. I smile on stage, so people frequently ask me, "Are you really that happy?" Yes! I've worked my whole life to be here, and I enjoy every minute. It took me a long time to be this successful. I truly love being a musician, and it's still a challenge for me every day. I am in the one of the best rock bands in the world, and I hope to keep doing this for a long time. In my opinion, Paul is the best vocalist and frontman in the world, with an amazing legacy and demands the best of everyone he plays with. It is because of Paul's perfectionism that I am as

good as I am today!

**What bandmates and management are saying about Jeff...**

*Howard Leese, guitarist*

For his birthday each year I get Jeff a new can opener. He keeps wearing them out because every night he opens up a big ol' can of whup-ass!

*Lynn Sorensen, Paul Rodgers' bassist.*

I've had the pleasure of working with Jeff for many years now. I'm a bassist and lead vocalist. Whether on stage with Paul Rodgers or in the studio with our original act "Sex And Violins", Jeff has the uncanny ability to find the right feel for any song. His talent for this is simply unrivaled. He's also just a great guy!

*Chris Crawford, Manager*

The first time I heard Jeff play Paul Rodgers' songs at the rehearsal studio in Seattle I knew he was ready for anything. Jeff does his homework! We've had a few drummers sit in with the band... nobody has that BIG beat that Jeff has. It's really been a pleasure working with Jeff.

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