



April 9, 2009

Familiar acts bring big surprises here

By CHARLES RUNNELLS
crunnells@news-press.com

Expect some surprises.

Yanni's hired some singers. John Oates of Hall and Oates shaved his moustache. And the once-gloomy Aaron Lewis is actually kinda happy now.

Sometimes the Staind frontman even breaks out into some Miley Cyrus onstage.

Really.

"You know, I'm going to be 37 in a few weeks," Lewis explains. "I'm not so angry anymore."

Those are just a few of the surprises in store this week - a week also notable for a surprising variety of live music possibilities in Southwest Florida.

Love you some "Maneater" and blue-eyed soul? Here come Hall and Oates.

Yearn for pulse-pumping hard rock? Pogo your way to Live X and headliner Staind.

Or maybe you just want to chill with some soaring New Age ditties? Try some soothing Yanni.

All three musical events are coming here in the next five days.

Yanni

The Greek musician has another surprise for fans who show up Wednesday at his Germain Arena concert.

The hair and moustache are gone.

That's right: THE hair and moustache. The ones that made Yanni an instantly recognizable New Age icon for years.

Yanni says he just got tired of the combo one day about three years ago. So he chopped them off.

His flowing mane was particularly annoying, he says, because it constantly got tangled in his scuba gear while diving off Greece. "I said, you know, this hair is getting on my nerves."

The haircut wasn't a marketing ploy to try selling himself to a broader, perhaps hipper, audience, Yanni insists. He just wanted something new.

"I like it this way," he says.

His new album, "Voices," however, is certainly a stab at crossover success. And it already seems to be working.

The album reached No. 20 on the Billboard Top 20 last week and No. 1 on the New Age charts. And a Spanish-language version, "Voces," shot to No. 5 on the Latin Pop chart.

Still, Yanni says he never would have tried this - his first album featuring actual singers - if the project didn't excite him creatively.

"I think this is the best sound I've ever had," he says of the upcoming concert. "The best music, the best production. Now with the addition of voices, I've got the widest-possible palette.

"I think it will really surprise the audience."

Just don't expect Yanni, himself, to break out into song. You don't want that kind of a surprise.

"I'm the worst singer in the world," he says and laughs.

Hall and Oates

John Oates is another performer often overshadowed by his famous facial hair. He shaved his upper lip more than 10 years ago, but people still picture him with 'stache intact.

"It's like a family photo album," says Oates, 60, in a telephone interview from the Colorado home he shares with his wife and a bunch of emus and alpacas. "Except this photo album is open for the whole world to see."

Oates embraces his former moustache, though. He's even set to co-star in a cartoon with the moustache as his super-powered alter ego.

The cartoon - called "J-Stache" - is still shopping for a home. Comedian Dave Attell voices the moustache, while Oates plays himself as "the modern John."

"I jumped on board because I thought it was really cool," he says of the project. "My moustache became this iconic symbol of a certain time.

"In a way, it's kind of funny."

Then again, Oates is known for much more than his moustache. He and Daryl Hall have racked up more pop hits than any other duo in history.

They'll be playing most of those hits Tuesday at Mann Hall - from "She's Gone" to "Kiss on my List" to "Private Eyes."

Oates and Hall knew some of those songs would be hits right away ("Maneater," for example). Others turned out to be pleasant surprises.

Take "Sara Smile." The duo never released it as a single - and then a radio DJ started playing it. Listeners called in, a buzz was built, and the song became one of their biggest hits ever.

But don't expect any new hits anytime soon. He and Oates are too busy with side projects, and there are no plans to record new material.

Oates, for example, sings and plays acoustic guitar on his second acoustic solo album, "1,000 Miles of Life," released last year. He's more interested in bluegrass and country these days, and he plans to keep writing songs in that vein.

Staind

Aaron Lewis wants to keep things fresh, too. And that means not rehashing angsty, pain-wracked songs like his best-known hit, "It's Been Awhile."

On Staind's latest album, "The Illusion of Progress," much of Lewis' venom has been replaced with a surprising ray of optimism. There's even an unabashed love ballad ("Tangled Up in You"). And the word "pain" doesn't appear anywhere in the album's lyrics. Not once.

Lewis feels that his dark days are behind him now. But he knows not all his fans like the newer, happier him. They still want the angry, angsty Lewis. Not the well-adjusted husband and father of three.

A person can't stay mad forever, he says. You grow up. You mellow.

Still, he insists that he hasn't gotten completely soft. Just more varied. So hard rockers will sit next to sunnier songs during Staind's Saturday concert at the Live X rock festival.

"It's still super emotional," Lewis says. "It's still raw."

Another big surprise for fans: the band's first out-and-out pop song, "All I Want."

Lewis still remembers jamming with the band and inadvertently writing the song. They were playing around with some chord progressions and cool guitar riffs, and suddenly there it was.

"At the end of it, we all kind of looked at each other and said, 'Whoa, I think we just wrote a pop song,'" Lewis says.

They almost didn't include it on "The Illusion of Progress." Then they decided they loved the tune too much to do that.

"If it's good," he says, "why does it have to be heavy?"

Some fans, no doubt, will cry "sellout." Lewis expects this. But he says he needs to be true to his muse.

Besides, he is trying to earn a living here. People forget that this is his job, he says. He always writes songs with radio and online play in mind.

"It's the music business," he says. "I still have to pay the bills and put food on the table for my children."

They must be doing something right. Staind have outlived most of its nu-metal brethren.

"I'm not selling out," Lewis says. "I'm surviving. The landscape is changing.

"Somehow, we're still somewhat relevant in music after 10 years."

Additional Facts

If You Go

Live X featuring Staind, Chevelle, Madina Lake, Cavo, Nonpoint, Cinder and Ekotren

When: 4:30 p.m. to about 11 p.m. Saturday (gates open at 4 p.m.)

Where: City of Palms Park, 2201 Edison Ave., Fort Myers

Tickets: \$35 (\$45 at the gate)

Call (888) 695-0888. You can also get tickets at Bill Branch Chevrolet in Fort Myers, Rick's Music in Cape Coral, Pipe Dreams in Bonita Springs and North Fort Myers, and the offices of 99X in Estero.

Info: Go to 99xwjb.com

Hall and Oates

When: 8 p.m. Tuesday

Where: Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall, 13350 Edison Parkway, Fort Myers

Tickets: \$46-\$66

Info: Call 481-4849 or go online at bbmannpah.com

Yanni

When: 8 p.m. Wednesday

Where: Germain Arena, 1000 Everblades Parkway, Estero

Tickets: \$25-\$79

Info: Call 948-7825 or go to the Germain box office. You can also get tickets from Ticketmaster by calling 334-3309, going to ticketmaster.com or visiting local Ticketmaster outlets.

