

Carla's Corner:

Carla Huntington for NewEARS

The John Wetton Interview: October 2013 - On Tour With District 97

John Wetton:

Definition- Versatility: ver·sa·til·i·ty

1. Capable of doing many things competently.
2. Having varied uses or serving many functions.
3. The state of being cognitively skillful.
4. The quality or state of being **versatile**. <a musician of great *versatility*>
5. **John Wetton**

There really isn't really one word to accurately describe John Wetton. Front man and singer for super-groups such as ASIA, UK, King Crimson and countless guest appearances with many more. Guitarist, lyricist and writer, John has been a cornerstone in the progressive rock music industry for many years. John's smooth vocals have been in big demand by a number of bands including recent appearances with Steve Hackett, Eddie Jobson, and District 97.

John's musical strength comes from a strong focus and a will to enjoy life as it comes. From successfully battling an alcohol addiction to dealing with some major health issues, John Wetton has been refined like metal in the fire and come out as pure gold.

In a time when most people are viewing their second half of life as a chance to slow down, John is holding strong to a schedule that most of his younger counterparts wouldn't remotely have the energy for.

Charity work, guest musician and singer, more new albums in the making, more touring, a successful solo career, and proud father, John is currently touring with the band District 97, enlightening young and old fans alike to the music of King Crimson.

In the midst of this heavy schedule, John graciously took time out to speak with me about his current tour and future plans.

Yes, "versatile" doesn't even begin to describe him but as he said, "The best is yet to come!"

NewEARS: In doing a little research for this interview I have been looking at your schedule for the past few years. It's incredible the amount of work that you have been doing and the many musical hats you have had to wear. How do you keep this workload up? Don't you get tired?

JW: Well...yes. LOL It's really a question of management, organization and getting everything in the right place. I do establish some ground rules with any band I am playing with. I need to be in my comfort zone. I just can't slip in and do everything that the other bands do. I kind of need to carry around my own comfort bubble, i.e. my computer, diary, journal, everything with me at all times and then I feel ok. I have to look after my health and manage my life differently than most people. My life is different now and for the better. I wouldn't have had this life if I hadn't taken care of myself, giving up alcohol and taking care of my health, so I am really grateful for these opportunities. I just enjoy doing it all. I love my work. I have a lot of things coming in for next year already so I don't see things changing all that radically. I don't see myself slowing down too much in the near future but things can

always change. I also recently became a vegetarian and that is good for my heart health. I went out for a birthday dinner with my son and the menu was meat, meat and more meat and I just looked at it and figured I had enough. So it's been about 4 months now and I am feeling well and we shall see what happens. So anyway, I feel good, still working hard, touring and enjoying myself.

NewEARS: I suppose we should start with the current tour and how this whole thing came about with the band District 97.

JW: How it started was a few years ago they had contacted me and asked me for a quote for their website. I listened to their album and checked out a couple of their YouTubes and found them a very exciting prospect. They are a young band; probably third generation progressive and they can really play. The talent is absolutely stunning and I include "Leslie" in that. Her singing technically is absolutely flawless. I was very excited and gave them a good quote for their website. Then they asked me to sing on their new album and sent over a track called "Perfect Young Man," to sing with Leslie in a duet. After that I happened to be playing in Chicago a few years ago and around the corner from a place that they were playing at called "Reggies." They asked me if I would come over and sing "Perfect Young Man," which I did. I was then asked to do a King Crimson song and we did another duet of a song called "Lament." The combination seemed to work really well so we decided to do some gigs and expand the set to include some more King Crimson and then we did a tour in Germany and Holland last year which went down incredibly well. We all talked and decided to a little bit more and I said, "Let's do it!" It helps them out and it helps me being associated with a new, young band. People have not been acquainted with their material but now they will get to know a bit about District 97 and vice versa. Yes, it works really well.

NewEARS: Robert Fripp recently announced his new plans for King Crimson and the new line up and plans for the band. Do you have any thoughts on that?

JW: No, not really. I mean it was pretty much unexpected. He hadn't mentioned anything to me. We knew that there was a possibility that there was going to be another King Crimson but I didn't know it was going to be this soon or who was going to possibly be in it. It's sounding like it's going to be a bit of the unconventional King Crimson and not the vocal led King Crimson, more of the recent albums and instrumentals. In any case, I wish them all good luck. I have always wished Robert the best in everything he does. I do wish them the best.

NewEARS: Of all the bands that you have been with, which one feels like your home base? Which one would you call home?

JW: For me it would be ASIA. No doubt about it. People say to me, "Well you have been in a lot of bands..." Well I have been in a lot of bands. I started in the early 70's and that was a long time ago. Lol The last 25/30 years have either been with ASIA or my solo stuff. The rest of it has been with UK, District 97, Steve Hackett and others and they have not really been my major breadwinners so to speak. They also aren't all me, but with ASIA you are getting all of me, the real thing.

NewEARS: Speaking of ASIA, I hear that your new guitarist has so far been really well received. How has he changed the mix of the band? Is he having a lot of influence and new ideas yet or is it still too early?

JW: Currently he is not adding to the composition of the group. I think it is a bit too early for that and we already have a sort of proven songwriting team in ASIA. He automatically has given the band a bit of a harder edge. I mean no disrespect to Steve by saying this. Steve is an amazing player and has been a great part of ASIA, but Sam gives the band a harder edge. He is a bluesy, young and aggressive player and by definition he will give the band a more

"rocky" kind of sound. So that is all we wanted. When Steve went we didn't want to go with another kind of Steve, we basically wanted to go with that harder edge. He came as a recommendation from Paul Gilbert, the guitarist from Mr. Big and anyone he recommends is great. Sam still has to get a bit used to us. Our sense of humour etc. LOL
NewEARS: I've seen ASIA's sense of humour. That could take about 20 years! LOL ;)

JW: It might well do! We have our own brand of humour. LOL
Sam is doing very well and is fitting in quite good. He is sensational. The band sounds twenty years younger.

NewEARS: So your new writing will reflect that "rocky sound?"

JW: Yes. Slightly more direct.

NewEARS: About your writing.... you have mentioned that you put your heart and soul into a lot of your lyrics. My next question is, when you write, whom do you write for? Your fans, the bands your with, or yourself?

JW: I don't write for any particular band. For instance, when Geoff and I are writing a song we don't think, "Well this one is for ICON and this one is for ASIA and that's it." I pretty much 100% write for myself. The person who influenced me the most on that was Joni Mitchell. When I was first starting to write in the late 60's, I was trying to write these artsy rock songs. I was always writing about someone else. Like I was observing people and writing about it. When Joni Mitchell came along, she wrote everything in the first person. "I do this, I do that, this is what you look like to me, etc." When I made that switch everything became that much clearer. If I write something that I find interesting or that I would like, there is a fair chance that someone else might like it. At least they know it is me. If I am writing about pain, it's my pain. If I am writing about a joyous occasion then they know it is my joyous occasion. If they click with that then that is great. If I try to second-guess what someone else is thinking then I am in trouble. Occasionally Geoff and I try to hatch a plot, but otherwise we try to stick to what we do. Ever since Joni Mitchell, my life has not been the same. That was a big light bulb in my career. So you are getting a big slice of me on an ASIA record.

NewEARS: Any more ICON stuff looming on the horizon? :)

JW: Yes, there will. There will be an album called ICON Zero, which is a lot of the stuff that ran before the first ICON record. Lot's of ideas that we had and put down before that first record. That will be offered in a box set that will be out next year.

NewEARS: Silently clapping and jumping up and down. :)

JW: Releasing that box set will give us a little breathing room before the next one. ICON is still very much alive and kicking but what we want to do is to move the entire catalog to some kind of manageable regime and put out a box set that will have everything on it. We have offers for tours but we haven't been able to fit it all in. Either Geoff is with YES or I am off with someone else. As soon as I get back from District 97 I will be working with Steve Hackett. We will be playing at the Albert Hall in London and I will come on and sing "Afterglow" with him. I will also be on the cruise with UK coming up and Steve will also be on the cruise. No doubt there will be the usual "cross fertilization" of bands there. It's hard not to. LOL I love Steve and I am sure there will be more things in the future.

NewEARS: If you had a wish list of people to work with, who would be on it?

JW: I actually am happy with the ones I have played with. I don't really have a list. I am sure there are going to be more people in the future but I am quite happy with the people that I

have come across.

NewEARS: I hear you are also going to be with the Les Paul Trio in NY?

JW: Yes. I will be doing a series of songs. Some Joni Mitchell, Steely Dan, Beatles, Marvin Gaye, Don Henley, all sorts of things. It should be fun. It's going out on the web in a simulcast of some sort. I am looking forward to it.

NewEARS: I was also looking at some of your charity work. You have recently been involved in a project called "Action Moves People." Can you tell me a little bit about that?

JW: Krista Wallhagen is doing this and I have met her a number of times and she is a great person. She asked if I could do a voice over type of thing, a poem on the album and I said yes.

(NOTE: ACTION MOVES PEOPLE is a collection of poems and songs that are an inspiration to people of all ages. A strong message of self understanding, self empowerment and global oneness are themes woven throughout this album with an acknowledgement that we are all one people, regardless of race, religion, age and lifestyle; that we can all endure the challenges of life, lift ourselves and each other up, and help one another through life's easy and difficult moments. Within this collection the artists deliver heartfelt and sincere performances of stirring poems and songs. All proceeds from the sales of this CD benefit the MOVE THIS WORLD charity which is a global nonprofit that uses creative movement to address and transform conflict and violence in communities. In partnership with schools, community-based organizations, families and corporations, MTW is building and connecting more peaceful communities with over 10,000 individuals across 22 cities and 4 continents.

NewEARS: Looking back, and I know you have said the best is yet to come, in your mind what has been one of the pinnacles of your career? Please keep in mind that this is going to be shown first to a Boston based audience and we would love you to say UK- Live at the Paradise. ;)

JW: I don't really have any that stand out. It has all been good. If I had to say something then it would be personally in my life. The two things that have been the best thing that has happened to me is my son, Dylan and me stopping drinking. Those are the best things that have ever happened to me and when you put those things together then I am a very happy guy. If you look at things in commercial success then there is King Crimson in 1973, 1982 with ASIA and the best solo album would have been "Battle Lines" in 1993. I still think there are plenty more to go.

NewEARS: and we totally agree with you John and are looking forward to seeing you on this tour and many more!

Also check out John's website at: <http://www.johnwetton.co.uk/>
Come see District 97 with John Wetton & The Music of King Crimson
Friday, October 11th at the Regent Theatre - Arlington, MA