

The rhythm of the rock world

Local drummer beating a path to the big time



Sioux Falls drummer Mark Craney reflects on his upcoming tour with Jethro Tull, one of the rock world's most successful bands.

By Ron Ziegler
Staff writer

Endless rehearsals and mind-numbing rounds of one-night stands have finally paid off for Mark Craney.

The left-handed Sioux Falls percussionist has been "paying his dues" with several area bands for years.

But now, Craney's big break has arrived. When he steps onto the stage in Washington, D.C. on Oct. 5, he will be part of one of the most successful bands in rock music history, Jethro Tull.

The big time doesn't come easily for a midwestern musician. The producers, agents, and recording studios that thrive on both coasts don't exist in the heartland.

But through persistence, Craney was able to overcome the problem of location.

Craney began his career as an eighth grader when he played with a band called "The Vandals," and later with "Rushmore." After that, he drummed with a variety of area bands, including "Zero Ted," "The Flippers," and in four separate versions of "The Chateaux."

In the mid-'70s he went to Denver with another local musician to try out the club circuit. But there was no work in the mile-high city.

It was time to move on.

"We came to a point where we had to decide, 'Do we go east or west?'" said Craney. "He went east, I went west."

Craney's travels took him to Los Angeles, where he landed a spot with jazz violinist Jean-Luc Ponty. A world tour and an album later, he was able to find work with Tommy Bolin, Mark Almond and Gino Vannelli.

Craney's association with Vannelli led to a hit single, "I Just Wanna Stop," and an American tour. But the end of the tour left Craney out of work once again.

In pursuit of a new job Craney went to New York where he recorded a demo tape with Eddie Jobson of the British band U.K. Jobson played the tape for Ian Anderson, Jethro Tull's founder and creative genius. Anderson liked what he heard and called Craney in for an audition for what was to be an Anderson solo effort.

Craney got the job.

When the producers heard the newly-recorded material, they persuaded Anderson to re-form Tull and release the album with the band's name. So Craney became the first American ever to play with the English band.

Craney's new job will take him to England in September for a month of rehearsal, followed by a two-

month tour of the United States. Then, after a short break, the band will hit the road again for a European tour. So for now, Craney's job hunt has ended.

"It's a long-term commitment. This is a one-in-a-million gig!" Craney says.

"I always expected something like this. It became almost second nature. Then, all of a sudden it was here."

Craney's new-found fortune hasn't gone to his head. His philosophy on fame remains the same as ever.

"Anytime you start thinking you're slick, you'll walk around the corner and meet someone slicker," he says. "It's just that simple."

And although Craney will be cavorting about the world with a bunch of Englishmen, his roots remain in South Dakota. He and his wife are purchasing a home here and plan to make Sioux Falls their permanent residence.

"There are memories on every street corner," he said. "Every exit on the freeway is a place I've played. And I've enjoyed it."

"It's a good thing everyone doesn't know how much fun (playing) is or everyone would be a musician."

As a matter of coincidence, Jethro Tull's next album entitled "A," will be released in the United States on Aug. 26, Mark Craney's 28th birthday. But Craney quickly points out that he doesn't want any presents.

"I've got everything," he says.

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