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guitar hero

DARYL STUERMER'S
GENESIS HAS
TAKEN HIM FROM
MILWAUKEE
TO AUDIENCES
WORLDWIDE

BY KIRSTEN KOROSEC



Photo by Dan Bishop

daryl Stuermer fell in love when most kids his age were still playing with action figures. He was 11 years old, still years from high school and all that comes with becoming a teenager — the cars, the parties, the angst.

It didn't matter. Stuermer had fallen hard. And he determined in those early years this is what he wanted in life.

Stuermer had discovered the guitar.

"At 11, Daryl knew what he wanted to do," says his wife and manager Michaela Carey Stuermer. "And that's exactly what he did. He just played the guitar."

It's been nearly five decades since Stuermer and his guitar found each other. And not much has changed. Sure, he was discovered by Frank Zappa's piano player and went on to play with renowned violinist Jean-Luc Ponty. He played to sold-out crowds all over the world as the touring guitarist and bassist for Genesis. And later he toured with Phil Collins' band and co-wrote the Grammy award-winning single "Something Happened on the Way to Heaven." He's released nine solo instrumental and compilation CDs under his own Urban Island Music label. He's a dad; a husband.

But it's still about the guitar and the passion he has for it. Stuermer is one of those rare breeds of modern-day man, who has always — and only — pursued one love, one career. He has never been anything but a musician — and a working one at that. No side gigs slinging pizzas and beer. No paper routes. "Well technically, I did teach guitar lessons briefly," Stuermer says. "At 11 I thought, 'This is what I want to do. I hope I can.'"

A New Project

Stuermer's passion for playing guitar hasn't wavered. In more recent years, Stuermer has focused on putting out instrumental albums. But fate intervened — as it often does in Stuermer's life — and he was inspired to go in a new direction.

Nearly two years ago Stuermer was preparing for a string of guitar clinics in Canada when he was contacted by Martin Levac, the leader singer of a successful Genesis tribute band. "He asked me to stay an extra night to watch him perform," Stuermer says. "And I have to say, it was great. The wheels started turning and I started thinking about adding vocals to my band. I have put Genesis songs in my shows before, but it's always been instrumental."



Photo by Robert Fritch

The result is a new project called Daryl Stuermer — Genesis Rewired, which takes the core members of Stuermer's instrumental band, and adds the vocals of Levac along with some re-imagined classic Genesis tunes. "We've had a really enthusiastic response so far," Stuermer says about his recent Genesis Rewired shows. "It's funny, people come up to me after shows and say 'I'm sorry I didn't know of you before, but I'm glad I discovered you now.' It's totally new and fresh and I'm reaching a whole new audience."

Genesis Rewired will be the Friday feature performance at the Gathering on the Green music and performing arts event in Mequon this July. "A number of people have suggested him. I think he'll appeal to the classic music crowd and the jazz crowd, which is perfect for us," says Beth Bauer, executive director of Gathering on the Green.

Photo by Michaela Carey Stuermer

Stuermer toured with Genesis from 1977-1992 and again in 2007.

Stuermer in Manchester, England, on the Genesis Turn it On Again: The Tour in 2007.

Your Normal, Average Virtuoso

The virtuoso guitarist is an oddity only in his early, seemingly predestined choice in life. Otherwise, Stuermer, a Milwaukee native and Whitefish Bay resident, is as regular as they come. And in those early days, he was even a bit shy, says his wife.

It was 1972 and Stuermer and his brother, Duane, had been playing gigs around the city for several years. Their latest band, Sweetbottom, which included saxophonist Warren Weigratz of Streetlife fame, was just hitting its stride. They had a five-night-a-week gig at the Sardino Bull Ring Ltd., and had developed a local following.

The band was looking for a singer and Michaela Carey was among those who auditioned. "Daryl called me a month later and asked me out on the premise that it was to talk about the job," Carey Stuermer says. "I didn't get the job. Recently, I went back and read my diary from that time and I had written 'great guy, but he's too shy.'"

Still, she was intrigued by his passion and knowledge of music. She found a different band more suited to her style and started dating Stuermer.

Back to His Roots

The couple did what many other musicians do and moved to Los Angeles. Not long after making the move, Stuermer was recommended as a replacement for departing Genesis member Steve Hackett. His career with Genesis began.

But five years in Los Angeles was enough for the young couple. And once their daughter Kelly was born, they decided to give Milwaukee a shot. "At the time I wondered and worried a little bit, as a professional musician, would I regret this move?" Stuermer says. "But it was probably the best decision we made. And the guys with Genesis didn't care. As they put it 'Hey, we live in England, so it doesn't really matter if we fly you out from L.A. or Milwaukee.'"

Like nearly everything else in Stuermer's life, it just felt like the right thing to do. "And I can't imagine it any other way," he says.

Technically, Stuermer never became a full-fledged member of Genesis. He toured with the band as its guitarist and bassist from 1977 to 1992, and again in 2007; and even co-wrote some songs with Phil Collins. When Genesis was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in March, Stuermer celebrated the moment even though he wasn't an official band member. "I know what I contributed to the band," he says. "And Phil (Collins) gave a nice acknowledgment when Genesis received the award, which wasn't necessary, but appreciated nonetheless." **M**