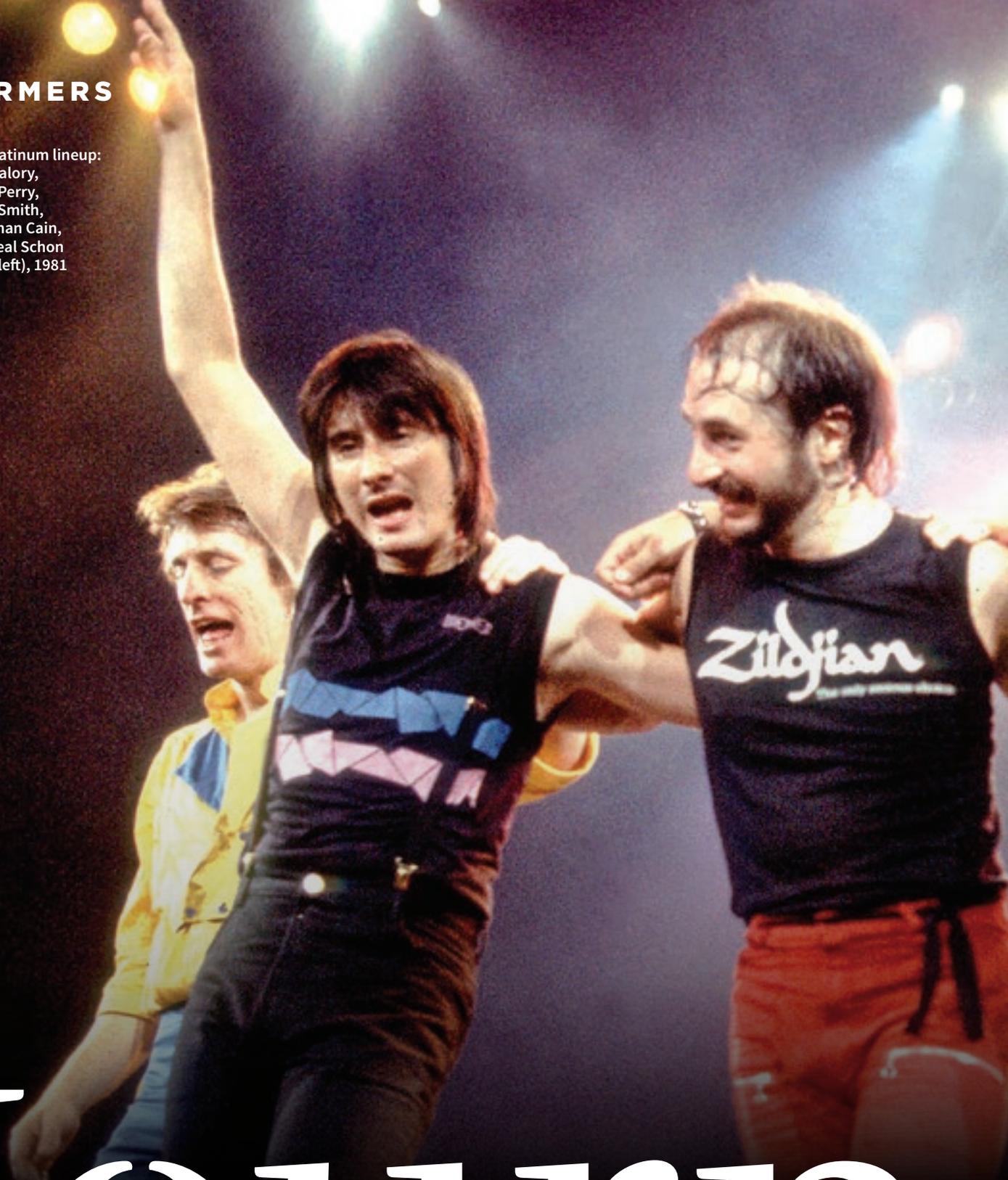


PERFORMERS

The platinum lineup:
Ross Valory,
Steve Perry,
Steve Smith,
Jonathan Cain,
and Neal Schon
(from left), 1981



JOURNEY

**THEIR IMPECCABLE VOCAL HARMONIES
AND ICONIC ANTHEMS HAVE FILLED
STADIUMS AROUND THE WORLD.**

BY ROBERT BURKE WARREN



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In the seventies, and especially the eighties, rock music became an international force, with album sales resulting in packed arenas and stadiums. Thanks to technology and a shrinking globe, bands suddenly reached untold millions; a hit song, beamed via satellite from culture to culture, could now touch hearts globally. Few groups embraced such unprecedented reach with as much enthusiasm and skill as Bay Area-based Journey.

Journey, version one:
Aynsley Dunbar, Valory,
Gregg Rolie, and Schon
(from left), 1976



The Californians not only rode the tsunami wave with panache, they created a template for bands aspiring to this level of engagement with fans. Most impressive, they are still at it, four decades on.

To say it all began humbly would be inaccurate, as there has rarely been anything humble about Journey. What teenage guitar wunderkind would quit a phenomenally successful band to try something new? That would be Neal Schon, who, with Santana keyboardist-vocalist Gregg Rolie – that’s him singing “Black Magic Woman” – quit Carlos & Co. in 1973 to form the Golden Gate Rhythm Section with bassist Ross Valory (hailing from Frumious Bander-snatch) and the Tubes’ drummer Prairie Prince, soon replaced by ex-Frank Zappa skinsman Aynsley Dunbar. The goal? Become the go-to San Francisco backup band for hire, a live version of L.A.’s famed Wrecking Crew recording studio ensemble.

Manager Herbie Herbert had other ideas. Upon hearing the quartet’s musical fireworks, he insisted they become a legit group, seek the spotlight for themselves, chase the white stag of fame. The clunky name, however, had to go. A roadie suggested Journey.

A deal with Columbia Records soon followed in 1974, but Journey’s genesis was fitful. Their music, featuring long solos, complex rhythms, and prog-rock flourishes, was radically different from the material that would, within a few years, catapult them to legendary status. “We were the original jam band,” Schon has said. A cult of fans loved their blistering

live act, but record sales languished and radio programmers yawned. After three albums, Columbia was losing patience. In 1977, the label demanded radio-friendly fare and a magnetic frontman, or else.

Herbert knew a strong singer, a striking Portuguese-American who’d been kicking around the So-Cal rock scene for years. By the time Herbert called, Steve Perry, pushing 30, was a maintenance man on a Leimooore, California, farm. Smarting from several near-misses with stardom, he was perilously close to chucking his rock & roll dreams. His mother insisted he give it one last shot.

At first, the band was leery of Perry’s distinctive Sam Cooke–influenced tenor, at times impossibly high. Would it jell with their decidedly hard-edged approach? Perry’s androgynous looks, too, were full-on glam – not their thing. But within weeks, Perry and Schon had successfully collaborated on “Lights,” and all knew they had something special.

For the next album, the band hired Roy Thomas Baker, then enjoying enormous success as the co-producer of Queen’s first three albums. With Journey, the famed architect of “Bohemian Rhapsody” sculpted a rock cathedral around Perry’s soaring voice. He stacked harmonies, creating a singular blend of the band members’ vocals; showcased Schon’s Les Paul; beefed up Dunbar’s drums; and compressed all into a glorious slab of sound the band titled *Infinity*.

The ever-astute Herbert recognized this quantum leap as an opportunity to rebrand his act – not only musically but visually. For *Infinity*, and the next four albums – *Evolution*, *Captured*, *Departure*,



**CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP**
Smith, Schon,
Valory, Rolie, and
Perry, all smiles in
1979; Perry points
the way, 1981;
Schon shreds it in
Long Island, New
York, 1981.

Selected Discography



INFINITY
Columbia 1978



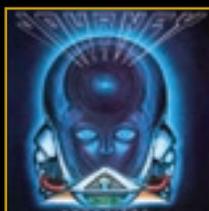
EVOLUTION
Columbia 1979



DEPARTURE
Columbia 1980



ESCAPE
Columbia 1981



FRONTIERS
Columbia 1983



RAISED ON RADIO
Columbia 1986



TRIAL BY FIRE
Columbia 1996



REVELATION
Nomota LLC 2008



and *Escape* – he hired Family Dog poster artists Stanley Mouse and Alton Kelley to design LP covers and merchandise with a certain “Journey look.” Not coincidentally, these decisions coincided with the band’s golden age. Or, rather, *platinum age*, as every one of the aforementioned albums achieved multiplatinum status.

Released in early 1978, *Infinity* blasted from car stereos and hi-fis nationwide. Radio suddenly loved Journey: the yearning of “Wheel in the Sky,” the singalong punch of “Feeling That Way/Anytime,” the wistful romanticism of “Lights,” all swathed in three-part harmonies that, crucially, the band nailed live and seemingly without effort. As the subsequent *Infinity* tour progressed, the LP flew off the shelves, peaking at Number 21 on the *Billboard* chart.

These heady times weren’t enough for Aynsley Dunbar, however. Just before the recording of 1979’s appropriately titled *Evolution* – again with Baker –

he left to join Jefferson Starship. Jazz-trained Steve Smith, former drummer with Ronnie Montrose, replaced him, providing a rock-solid swing to propel Journey to their commercial peak.

Evolution’s Perry-composed “Lovin’, Touchin’, Squeezin’,” a clear homage to Sam Cooke, was Journey’s first single to break the Top Forty, hitting Number Sixteen in late 1979. After touring, the band headed back into the studio for *Departure* (1980), the title of which may have been an omen concerning Rolie. Although Journey scored another smash with the Perry-Schon-penned “Any Way You Want It,” Rolie decided to move on.

For his replacement, the band enlisted keyboardist, songwriter, and vocalist Jonathan Cain, of power popsters the Babys, who had opened for Journey on the *Departure* tour. While they primarily needed a new keyboardist, the band got a lot more. With elec-



Valory, Schon, and Perry (from left) rock the L.A. Forum, 1980.

tric piano and modern synthesizers in place of Rolie's Hammond B-3, Cain brought Journey's sound firmly into the eighties. Even more important, he had a hand in writing all ten songs on Journey's monster 1981 album, *Escape*, their first Number One.

But most significantly, Cain brought the band the now-iconic keyboard riff for "Don't Stop Believin," soon to be Journey's signature song. After peaking at Number Nine, this four-minute anthem has never gone away, becoming part of the cultural firmament, impervious to shifts in fashion and commerce, or the onslaught of time. Clearly, Cain and the boys uncorked something powerful. Years after its release, bolstered by inclusion in the 2007 finale of *The Sopranos*, it is one of the most downloaded songs of the twentieth century.

Another Cain melody, a waltz rejected by Babys lead singer John Waite as "sentimental rubbish," became "Open Arms," a power ballad nonpareil.

Although Schon expressed reservations about it ("It sounds like *Mary Poppins!*" he said), the song showcased Perry at his most operatic, rousing countless fans to their feet, lighters aloft, in arenas across the land. It hit Number Two in early 1982. Like "Don't Stop Believin," "Open Arms" enjoys a robust life into the present day, with multiple covers, heavy rotation on classic rock radio, and frequent trotting out on reality TV.

For *Frontiers* (1983), Cain crafted his first solo composition for the band: "Faithfully," a power ballad sung by Perry, was another hit. With the addition of "Separate Ways (Worlds Apart)," an R&B-inflected rocker written while on the *Escape* tour, Journey's dominance of eighties rock radio continued. Both tunes made the Top Twenty, and videos for each became mainstays on MTV. The former was a landmark "life on the road" production (much imi-



FROM TOP Living on the road, 1981; Journey get their stars on the Hollywood sidewalk, 2005.



Songs from Journey's "platinum era" continue to pulse with undeniable vibrancy well into the digital age.



tated in years to come); the latter was Journey's first and last "concept" video.

In a few short years, Journey had become one of the biggest bands in the world, but beneath the impeccable harmonies, discord brewed. After a hiatus, during which all members engaged in solo projects, they returned in 1986 with *Raised on Radio*. Perry coproduced, clashing with Valory and Steve Smith – both of whom then left, replaced by studio musicians. Journey was unstoppable, however, with the album yielding several hits: "Be Good to Yourself," "I'll Be Alright Without You," "Girl Can't Help It," and "Suzanne." *Raised on Radio* sold two million copies and spawned a hugely successful tour – Perry's last with the band – featuring future *American Idol* judge Randy Jackson on bass. Success aside, by the close of 1987, tensions were at a breaking point, and Journey went on hiatus again, this time for almost a decade.

The bonds remained strong, however. By the mid-nineties, Cain was calling Perry to help him finish some songs. Before long, Valory and Smith were back in the fold, and in 1996, the band released *Trial by Fire*. Despite the myriad changes in the pop landscape, and the near-total absence of rock bands from the charts, Journey once again found their audience. *Trial by Fire* produced the hit Perry-Schon-Cain ballad "When You Love a Woman," and received a Grammy nomination for Best Pop Performance by a Duo or Group. But before a tour could be arranged, Perry collapsed in excruciating pain during a hike. He was diagnosed with a degenerative bone condition that required hip surgery, which he put off for months. With Perry unable to tour, the band hired a replacement singer. After twenty years of music making, Steve Perry and Journey parted ways. (Eventually, Perry had the operation and made a full recovery.)

While Perry retreated into private life, the band continued in other iterations: eight years with vocalist Steve Augeri (1998–2006), then a remarkable resur-

gence with current frontman Arnel Pineda, a Filipino powerhouse discovered by Schon via YouTube videos of his cover band playing in a Manila hotel bar. The Pineda-era Journey released the platinum *Revelation* (2008), which yielded the Adult Contemporary hit "After All These Years." The band's subsequent 2009 world tour with Pineda was one of the highest-grossing of the year. (The whole rock & roll Cinderella story is the basis of the acclaimed 2012 documentary *Don't Stop Believin': Everyman's Journey*.)

In 2014, with no advance fanfare, Steve Perry emerged onstage several times with longtime friend Mark Oliver Everett's indie band, Eels. At the Fitzgerald Theater in St. Paul, and the Orpheum in L.A., Perry's impromptu appearances created pandemonium. In a voice remarkably intact, he crushed Eels' "It's a Motherfucker," as well as Journey chestnuts "Open Arms," "Lights," and "Lovin', Touchin', Squeezin'." (Millions have viewed the YouTube videos of these sets.)

All the while, songs from Journey's "platinum era" continue to pulse with undeniable vibrancy well into the digital age, around the globe, streaming constantly from servers, captured on smartphones, dragged into iTunes collections. In an age when the album format is on the wane, Journey's 1988 *Greatest Hits* compilation, which spent 411 weeks on the *Billboard* album chart, still sells five hundred thousand copies a year. It is the sixth-highest certified greatest-hits package in America (after the Eagles, Billy Joel, Elton John, and the Beatles' red and blue compilations).

Few bands create a unique musical landscape that exists both within and without them. Journey, clearly, is one of those few. As their name suggests, they promise a sojourn, an endless road with numerous stops along the way, rather than a destination or finish line. Their 2017 stop? The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.