

Deep Purple legend a hurdy-gurdy man

DON HAMMONTREE music | Published: May 18, 2011

In 1971, if you'd have told British guitar star Ritchie Blackmore that in 40 years he'd be playing Renaissance fair music on a **hurdy-gurdy** in castle courtyards throughout Europe he would never have believed you. That was the year Blackmore and his **Deep Purple** band mates recorded one of the greatest guitar anthems of all time, "Smoke on the Water," for their now-classic hard rock/heavy metal album "Machine Head."

Churning out molten metal riffs and blistering solos in **Deep Purple** and Rainbow was Blackmore's stock in trade until 1997, when he and his wife, Candice Night, released their first album together, "Shadow of the Moon," under the name Blackmore's Night. Since then, the guitarist has focused on medieval-flavored folk-rock featuring arrangements for penny whistles, recorders, mandolins and **hurdy-gurdy**.

Blackmore calls Blackmore's Night — which plays Berklee Performance Center on Thursday — his "labor of love." The duo's latest CD, "Autumn Sky" (dedicated to the couple's infant daughter), topped Billboard's New Age charts earlier this year.

"I didn't embark on this project intending it to be successful," Blackmore, 66, said by phone from his home on Long Island. "I just have an incredible passion for this kind of music and wanted to do it. During my final days in **Deep Purple** and Rainbow, I felt I was getting stale at writing hard-rock riffs, that I was repeating myself, and I just couldn't stand it. So switching to this was rejuvenating, very refreshing.

Influenced by acts as diverse as the late English folk musician David Munrow, the German band Des Geyers, Bob Dylan and even Stevie Nicks (one of Night's favorites), Blackmore's Night has its strongest following in Europe, where the band often performs in historic castles and fortresses. "Actually, it's harder to book shows here in America," Night said. "But in Europe, the castles aren't all that difficult. We have a great, hard-working crew that's always up for a challenge. We even performed a show in an underground salt mine in Poland that took hours and hours to set up, but they pulled it off."

With his quirky new direction and partnership with Night, Blackmore has found an unlikely niche in an industry he has often viewed with disdain.

"Bob Dylan has always been one of my heroes because he's never wanted to deal with the nonsense side of the music business," he said of the **man** who, like himself, has been labeled as "mysterious" and "difficult" to work with. "Having to follow this trend, talk to this person on the radio, be on this show. I find it's very hard for me to do. I **don't** like having to sell myself constantly."

Blackmore's Night at Berklee Performance Center, Thursday. Tickets: \$30-\$45; 617-747-2261.

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'LABOR OF LOVE': Rock **legend** Ritchie Blackmore and wife Candice Night, center, play Berklee on Thursday.

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