

Resurrecting the Renaissance

Blackmore's Night takes rock legend back in time

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OLD'S COOL: Blackmore's Night

It's one of the most recognizable rock 'n' roll riffs ever. Even if you don't know the rest of the song, you know the opening riff. All you need to hear are the first three chords to start humming the hard rock nugget "Smoke on the Water."

Ritchie Blackmore's signature guitar will live on in that one song even if nothing else he did matters. But it does. Blackmore's stints in Deep Purple and Rainbow are forever etched in the eardrum-battered alleyways of rock.

But for the last decade Blackmore's music has traveled to the past going back centuries, way back to the Renaissance. Blackmore and vocalist/lyricist Candice Night have been bringing back the romanticism and aura of that epoch with their Renaissance-inspired band, Blackmore's Night, since the late '90s.

"Ritchie was always inspired by the Renaissance," Night says. "Whenever he would get off the stage he would listen to traditional music, even though he's been playing rock music for 40 years. He's always kind of reveled in that; he has a passion for this music. He's challenged by the musical instruments as well such as hurdy-gurdy or the nickel harp.

"Even in Rainbow, when you listen to 'Temple of the King' Ritchie was incorporating sixteenth century melodies. So for him, it's nothing new, but with a softer, female vocalist. Adding some newer arrangements, keeps it interesting," she adds.

Blackmore and Night met in 1989 when Deep Purple played a soccer match against employees of a Long Island radio station where she worked. The duo discovered their shared love of Renaissance culture and, shortly after, became a couple.

Night wrote some songs for Rainbow and sang back-up in the early '90s. In 1997, Blackmore began playing and recording Renaissance-inspired music. He would play the acoustic music at home and Night would casually start singing along. This informal jamming blossomed into Blackmore's Night and the band's debut album, *Shadow of the Moon*, was released in 1998.

This fantasy music could have come off as kitschy new age, but the couple instills a moody, ethereal feel to it all. And they evoke bygone eras with touches of Celtic and world folk rhythms.

In this band, Blackmore largely plays acoustic guitar where Night's voice adds a haunting and seductive layering. Her lyrics dabble in romanticism and although some sappiness seeps in, she writes from the heart and her words slow-dance with the music. This is contemporary music, though, not an academic study in dated Renaissance music.

Long-running fans can rest assured; Blackmore hasn't given up his Fender Stratocaster. The band polishes off old hard-rock classics, replete with a Renaissance touch, during their live performances.

Blackmore recruited other musicians from around the globe to combine bits of world music, new age, rock and folk for his current band's musical backdrop. It all revolves around Night's voice and Blackmore's acoustic guitar along with mandolins, keyboards, pennywhistles, violins, tambourines, military drums and hurdy-gurdies.

This band of 21st century wandering minstrels and troubadours revel in the Renaissance and, over the past decade, Blackmore's Night has toured and played in castles and historic locales in several European countries. The six-piece band performs material inspired by sounds dating back to the 1700s, 1600s and 1500s.

They also incorporate visuals from the era into their performances to create an "escape from the daily lives," as Night likes to describe it. Many fans, young and old, attend their shows in traditional clothing. The band has created its own sub-genre of folk-rock that is mystical and unique. It's a journey to a simpler time where art, music and romance flourished.

Candice Night weaves her vocals into her lyrical myths and fairy tales. She writes the words after Blackmore plays her a tune, opposite of what a lot of bands do when they compose music around a written song. "He is the man in the music and I'm the woman in the words," she says describing their creative partnership.

The band released the CD *The Village Lanterne* last year and there's a new DVD set to be released in November called *Paris Moon*.

Blackmore's Night will perform on Thursday, Oct. 25, at 8 p.m. at the McGlohon Theatre. Tickets are \$28.50-\$32.50. For further details call (704) 372-1000 or visit www.blumenthalcenter.org.