

All Too Frequently Asked Questions

The following is an imaginary interview of the sort which I do several times a day at the peak of promotional activity, and where the most common topics eat up valuable time, thereby reducing the number of interesting and original questions and answers which might have been fitted in.

Hopefully you, the journalist, will find these Q and A's useful. A little pre-interview preparation in reading these pages as well as taking a look at the general contents of the site should, hopefully, save us both some time and trouble. Forgive my presumptions. Just trying to be helpful.

Regards,
IA

How did you get the name Jethro Tull?

Back in February, 1968, we had many different names which usually changed every week, since we were so bad that we had to pretend to be some new band in order to get re-booked in the clubs where we aspired to find fame and fortune. Our agent, who had studied History at college, came up with the name Jethro Tull (an eighteenth century English agricultural pioneer who invented the seed drill). That was the band name during the week in which London's famous Marquee Club offered us the Thursday night residency. So it stuck. Is it too late to change? I thought so.

Who are the current band members?

Myself, Ian Anderson, on flute, vocals, acoustic guitar, harmonica and mandolin. Martin Barre on Electric guitar. Doane Perry on drums. Andrew Giddings on keyboards and Jonathan Noyce on bass.

Why have there been so many changes in line-up over the years?

Lots of different reasons. Some of the boys left to get married, settle down, form their own bands, that sort of thing. Jeffrey Hammond-Hammond left to be a painter. John Glascock tragically died from a heart disease. And two were fired. We are all pretty good pals now. Like a big extended family of two football teams.

In 1976, you named a famous Tull track "Too Old To Rock And Roll". What do you feel about this title, looking back on it now?

It was not, then or now, an autobiographical statement. It was an album track which was about the cyclic changes of fashion in culture, pop and rock music. Quite predictive for 1975 really, given the endless recycling of 60's and 70's musical influences which fill the charts these days.

In 1973, Jethro Tull disbanded following the bad reviews of "A Passion Play". Why?

No, we didn't! Our then manager decided to respond to a bad review in the influential pop newspaper Melody Maker by cutting a deal with the editor for a front page "scoop" involving the band's supposed decision to quit. We knew nothing about it until we read it in the paper ourselves, and we were furious. It made us look petulant and silly. Which we probably were, but we didn't need the wrong kind of publicity. Tull have never disbanded, even for a moment. No come-back tours for us, thank you very much. We haven't yet been away!

Are you, like the song, "Living in the Past"?

I am not one for nostalgia or reminiscences and prefer to live in the present and the future. However, some of our audience obviously like the nostalgia bit, and the older material which we play is, for them perhaps, a trip down memory lane. For us, it's not about playing a song which could be thirty years old. It's about playing something 24 hours old, since that's when we probably last played it on stage. Our style of music is, I hope, a little bit timeless and not rooted in a particular music fashion.

Pop and Rock music have changed a great deal over the last 30 years. How do you view these changes? And do you listen to the new music like Techno and Rap?

Well, the really big changes were back in the early years of the mid-to-late sixties and the early seventies. The introduction of musical influences from many diverse world cultures and historical periods provided for a rapidly evolving and richly creative musical environment. Folk, Classical, Blues, Jazz and Asian motifs and forms broadened the scope of American-derived pop and rock. Tull were a part of that evolution. Since the mid-seventies, the development has been more technological rather than musical. Sampling, synthesis, sequencing and the personal home computer revolution have brought music making to the masses at an affordable price. But the music goes round in circles. Same old simple rhythms, melodies, harmonies and verse/chorus/bridge song structures. Nothing really changes: nothing is really new. But each new generation of young musicians rediscovers the wheel, The Beatles, sunglasses and stretch limousines. As long as they and their fans think it is new, why disappoint them? Give the kids a pot of paint and they will repaint their house. Same old bricks underneath. Techno and Rap? Just nursery rhymes with attitude. Nice idea but going round in very small circles.

You are now one of the old men of rock - over 50 years of age. How long do you plan do go on performing and recording?

As long as it remains a challenge and my health permits. One year: ten years - who knows? Then there are painting, writing and other creative indulgences to consider. Which will go first: the eyes, ears or the hands? Fear of boredom in old age is my greatest concern.

Do you have Family? A wife? Children? Where do you live?

I enjoy the company and love of my wife of 23 years, Shona, two children, James and Gael, both at University, five cats, two dogs and some horses and chickens. We live in an eighteenth century English country house with a recording studio, 400 acres of wheat, barley and trees about 100 miles west of London. Disgusting isn't it? Want to swap? Thought so.

Is it true you are also a fish farmer? How did you get interested in that hobby and will you retire from music to concentrate on it full-time one day?

In 1978, we bought a second home in Scotland, where I was born. We were looking for some way to off-set the cost of owning the property and I read, in an airline magazine as I recall, an article about Aquaculture. We set up a Salmon farm at the beginning of that then new industry's development. A smoking and processing factory and more fish farms followed and today they employ about 250 people in the Highlands of Scotland. But my time on the business is limited to around one day a month. When I wake up in the morning, I am a musician, not a farmer or fish salesman. That's what I pay other people to do. I just like eating smoked salmon from one of the most beautiful parts of the world. Death may beckon, but retirement does not.

Do you listen to new bands and who are your favourites?

I receive rather a lot of unsolicited demo tapes and CD's from would-be musicians as well as from more professional performers, so I listen to a lot of "new" stuff that way. The car radio and music television keep me as informed as I want to be. But I have never been a great listener of other people's work. Even when I first started, I listened only to a few things which really caught my attention. My favourite music to listen to these days is that of Muddy Waters, Beethoven and Indian Classical and pop music.

Jethro Tull is one of the legends of Rock. Why do you think the band has lasted so long?

The loyalty of our fans keeps us in work and pocket money. Some artists have fickle fans who have short attention spans. More loyal and committed fans ensure that the work of some bands like Zeppelin, The Grateful Dead, Hendrix and the Stones won't fade away. Tull is just a lesser version of those rock giants whose music will go on to define the form in the history books of the future.

Is concert touring as exciting as before or do you ever become tired of it?

It's my job. When I was a child, I always wanted a great job. I didn't leave Art College to become pop star: I left to attempt a career as a professional working musician. I love my job and I still have it. And I already got the gold watch. You want my job? You want to swap? I thought so.

Q Don't you hate having to play the same songs, like Aqualung or Locomotive Breath, every night after so many years?

If they were not decent songs, then I certainly would, but I am lucky to have a good collection of material which I still enjoy playing. There are over 250 songs to choose from, in fact. Anyway, much of Tull's music contains elements of improvisation, so the songs are never the same two nights running. There is always some scope for variation and interpretation in each performance. A Tull concert wouldn't be the same without some of Locomotive Breath. Well, for me at any rate.

If you could choose the words for your epitaph, what would they be?

"Thank you and goodnight". Or perhaps, "Any chance of a wake-up call?" I think that probably covers it.

Well, thank you for answering these questions one more time.

Don't mention it. Ever, ever again.