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THE DOCTOR OF PROG: ROBERT ILLESH!

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Elevenses Throws Eleven Quick Questions At 'The Doctor Of Prog' Robert Illesh!

Robert is a versatile player with a tendency towards unusual and extraordinary work, which kind of reflects his life and view of life in general. Rooted in the progressive genre, he effectively meanders across all styles including classical, jazz, folk, rock and fusion, arriving at a style which is ultimately classic, but intimately his own.

Current credit highlights include working with Steve Howe and Jon Anderson of Yes, Glenn Cornick and Clive Bunker of Jethro Tull and Steve Grant of The Sweet.

Robert is the creative driving force behind new progressive project Aquaplanage which is essentially a classic prog album with some modern twists. It is on sale in all the usual places.

SO WHAT'S YOUR DRINK OF CHOICE AT 11AM IN THE MORNING?

Pure still water – like the mind after a morning yoga session.

WHICH SONG/ALBUM REALLY MADE YOU WANT TO PLAY GUITAR?

Please Please Me by the Beatles heard on a scratchy AM radio in the kitchen circa 1980ish. All those jangly bits between the harmony vocals sounded really cool. Especially as the radio reception phased in and out adding lots of colourful noise!

WHO'S THE WORLD'S GREATEST GUITARIST?

Me, ha ha ha! It's good to dream and have aspirations... No, I think currently that goes to Larry Carlton – he's got the chops and more importantly a great feel and stage presence. Time again veterans in the field remind me that it is not just about the ability to play 1000 notes very quickly. That is good, but every so often in my life someone has made a challenge to move them to tears with one note. Achieved it a couple of times...

WHO'S THE WORLD'S MOST UNDERRATED GUITARIST?

Martin Barre of Jethro Tull. He has made an amazing career playing second fiddle to a great autocrat of rock Ian Anderson; and without getting fired, which is doubly amazing.

SO WHAT ARE YOU UP TO AT THE MOMENT?

Right now??? I'm about to go for a walk through my woods at the back of my house in the morning frost – time out after an intense 2 days rehearsing up north.

I am a full time touring member of Steve Grant's (The Sweet, George Harrison, Alan Price, The Animals) Barockestra. We play rocked up version of famous baroque and classical music, wearing period costume. I play guitar, midi guitar and keyboards (all at once sometimes). Working mainly on mainland Europe.

I also have a new progressive rock album called Aquaplanage which is going to be a contemporary prog



classic, well I think so anyway. Otherwise I am a long term member of Fragile, Europe's premier Yes tribute band. We had Steve Howe join us for some dates in 2005, 2006 and 2007.

Do a number of local things, including occasionally blowing mad fusion in front of bewildered guests with your very own Nick Andrew.

Oh, and I am collaborating with Jon Anderson (Yes) on some acoustic interpretations of Yes material as I have grounding in mandolin, banjo, harmonica, didgeridoo, flute, Aaron sweater, knobby beer glasses etc.

WHAT WAS THE LAST GIG YOU WENT TO (AS A MEMBER OF THE AUDIENCE)?

Most memorably Focus in London. I love that band. They've got original drummer Pierre van der Linden back and a couple of newer boys on bass and guitar. They still do a smashing job and the new material is as captivating and bonkers as the old. Great to hear a real hammond live as well. Not sure what Thijs van Leer keeps under his cowboy hat though... 2 hours of relative discomfort standing in the 'mosh pit' (and one celebrity incident of someone recognising me as 'you're so-and-so from...') was offset by a fantastic show.

WHO WOULD BE IN YOUR DREAM LINE-UP?

Lead Guitar: Martin Barre

Rhythm Guitar: Larry Carlton (think about that one)

Hammond organ and yodelling: Thijs van Leer

Synths: Adam Wakeman

Bass: Geddy Lee

Drums: Nick d'Virgilio (Spock's Beard)

Vocals: Idina Menzel, Kristin Chenoweth (Wicked the musical)

Backing flute: Ian Anderson (think about that one as well)

Violin: Lucia Micarelli (to distract everyone with her amazing talent... of course)

HOW MANY GUITARS DO YOU OWN AND WHICH ONE IS 'YOUR PRECIOUS'?

About 11 at last count. Enjoying playing my mkIII Gibson Howard Roberts Fusion a lot these days. 'My Precious' is probably my 1989 Heritage Sunburst Les Paul Standard which was the first 'proper' guitar I ever got. It's looking nice and gnarled now and always plays like a dream, without misbehaving.

WHAT'S THE LAST GREAT ALBUM THAT YOU BOUGHT (OR WERE GIVEN)?

Snow by Spock's Beard. It's a 2 CD concept prog album about a psychic albino priest who goes to New York.

DO YOU SUFFER FROM STAGE FRIGHT?

Nah – had too many years of doing ridiculous things like playing the Clap by Steve Howe in front of festival audiences, or Stairway to Heaven on mandolin in front of a tanked up Friday night crowd, or Swan Lake on bassoon on midi guitar wearing white stockings to care any more.

SO WHAT'S YOUR DRINK OF CHOICE AT 11PM IN THE EVENING?

Peppermint tea – and if I'm feeling really extravagant I'll leave the teabag in!

www.myspace.com/robertillesh

www.barockestra.com

www.aquaplanage.com

Interview by Nick Andrew

Elevenes aquaplanage jethro tull prog Steve Howe yes

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