

ROCK DUO DWELLS IN MEDIEVAL TIMES
DEEP PURPLE GUITARIST, SINGER SHARE LOVE OF RENAISSANCE STYLE

Sunday, October 21, 2007

Section: ARTS

Edition: ONE-THREE

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Caption: KAYOS PRODUCTIONS PHOTO. Ritchie Blackmore and Candice Night of Blackmore's Night.

When Candice Night was growing up as a teenager on Long Island, she didn't expect her future career would include dancing on stage in Renaissance garb and singing what's best described as gypsy rock with legendary Deep Purple guitarist Ritchie Blackmore.

"I always knew I wanted to be around music. It was always my great escape to put on headphones and disappear into this musical world, but I was never the type of person that formed a band when I was a teenager," said Night, 36. "I didn't have the confidence to be on stage. I really figured I would work for a radio station or record company."

During a stint as an intern at a Long Island rock station, she met Blackmore at a charity soccer match. "I asked Ritchie for an autograph, and he sent a roadie through the crowd and asked me to meet him at a pub that night," she recalled of their 1989 meeting.

The pair shared a love of music, fantasy and the supernatural, among other things, and a friendship ensued. The relationship with Blackmore, who is 26 years her senior, eventually turned romantic, and in 1993 Night hit the road with Deep Purple, and Blackmore invited her to sing backing vocals.

"They set up a microphone behind curtains and amplifiers, so no one could see me," she said. She eventually began contributing lyrics to Blackmore's other band, Rainbow.

Blackmore's Night, the couple's group that appears Thursday at McGlohon Theater, grew out of evenings sitting in front of the fireplace writing songs on acoustic guitar.

"When I met Ritchie he would only listen to Renaissance music, which is funny for a legendary rock guitarist. I think people who are die-hard Ritchie Blackmore fans can see reflections of the Renaissance in his rock music. When he first wrote 'Smoke on the Water' he was writing it in medieval modal scales," she said. "I had never heard Renaissance music before, but I was going to Renaissance fairs. I never got into the historical accuracy side of it. It was the romantic visuals, incredible castles and knights in shining armor."

Night still loves Renaissance fairs and will try to make it to the Carolina Renaissance Festival in Huntersville on her day off in Charlotte while visiting her brother and sister, who both live here.

She says she's visited Charlotte several times and is familiar with the city's must-haves like The Penguin, but the band has never actually played here before. "We'll have to go get fried pickles and head over to the festival. If only I could work NASCAR into my schedule."

The couple's interest in that fantastical and romantic time period extends beyond its stage show, which includes traditional instruments and costumes.

"Living today you can incorporate anything that came before. It doesn't have to be historically accurate to weave into your world," she said. "Look at Christina Aguilera doing the whole '20s and '30s thing. We happen to choose the flowy-ness of the Renaissance."

Night, who may remind rock fans of Stevie Nicks with her long blond waves and gauzy dresses, wears layered flowing dresses similar to her stage clothes most days. "We're so different than a normal family, especially here on Long Island. We'll have parties where people come in Renaissance garb and have a bonfire in the backyard. At midnight we'll go on owl prowls in the forest behind our house. We'll have lanterns and wear cloaks," she said with a laugh. "I'm sure all of our neighbors think we're insane. We're the Addams Family at the end of the road."

The Addams Family may be a stretch, but the supernatural is an ongoing theme for the couple.

"We try to stay in as many reportedly haunted places as possible when we're touring," Night explains. A performance of one of her compositions, "Catherine Howard's Fate" (about King Henry VIII's fifth wife, who was beheaded), actually resulted in a report of a ghost sighting. "We played right outside the actual palace where she lived with Henry VIII. The next morning the front page of the paper read 'Hampton Court Calls in Ghost Hunters: Catherine Howard's Ghost Seen.'"

PREVIEW

Blackmore's Night

Folk rock with Renaissance overtones, featuring vocalist Candice Night and guitarist Ritchie Blackmore.

WHEN: 8 p.m. Thursday.

WHERE: McGlohon Theater, 345 N. College St.