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Interview With Kevin Rankin – Drummer for A Flock of Seagulls – Portland, Oregon

By Susan Welch | December 9th, 2017 | Written Interviews | Comments Off

A Flock of **Seagulls** are an English new wave and synthpop band originally formed in Liverpool 1980.

Everyone knows the song, “I Ran (I Ran So Far Away).” It was a staple in the 80s with heavy rotation on MTV, and brought back to life for the younger generation through video games, movies, and commercials.

While “I Ran” is the song that saw the most commercial success for A Flock of Seagulls, they had other hits such as “Space Age Love Song” (1982), “Wishing (If I Had a Photograph of You)” (1982), and “The More You Live, the More You Love” (1984). In 1983, they won a grammy for the Best Rock Instrumental Performance for their song DNA.

While they’ve only released five studio albums over the span of 35 years, they have never stopped making and playing music. Founder, and the only original member, Mike Score (lead vocals, keyboards, and guitar) has kept this well loved band going, and they show no signs of stopping.

I had the privilege of sitting down with Kevin Rankin, the current drummer for A Flock Of Seagulls. If only I had turned the recorder on during our hour long chat prior to the interview...Not only is he a very talented drummer, but he is an incredibly nice guy.

MIRP: Kevin, welcome and thank you! How does it feel to be a vital part of this well loved band?

KR: I love it. I’m feeling blessed.

MIRP: Mike Score is the lead vocalist, and plays keyboards and guitar. He is also the only original member?

KR: Yes, he is the founding member and only original bandmate.

MIRP: How is it working with such a seasoned musician who has kept this band going for so long?

KR: I really appreciate his dedication to defining the 80s sound and what we do in A Flock of Seagulls, and really going after it. He is meticulous that the sounds and the energy is reflective of their style. He is really a fair business guy and he really appreciates and enjoys the gigs we do and seems to consider it more fun than it being work.

MIRP: I haven’t seen a video for this band in a long time...does he still have the iconic hair style?

KR: He’s bald...

MIRP: My brother’s ringtone for the last ten years for when I call has been “I Ran.” We loved that song so much.

KR: Nice! That’s awesome. They joke sometimes and have me do my hair that way, because I still can.

MIRP: That’s awesome.

KR: Mike has a great sense of humor about it, by the way.

MIRP: Mike is obviously the lead singer and plays keyboards, we know that from the videos. But he also plays guitar. Does he do that just for recordings or does he play live also?

KR: He does play guitar live. There are a couple of newer songs that he plays guitar on.

MIRP: There was a span from 1986 to 1988 where the band took a hiatus. Is that is the only time the band has taken a break?

KR: From what I understand, yes.

MIRP: Your other band mates, are they good guys?

KR: They are awesome. They are absolutely great men. Joe Rodriguez is the guitarist, and Pando, is the bass player. The former drummer Michael Brahm is a great friend of mine too. They were almost like family to me before I joined, which helps a lot.

MIRP: That is what I wanted to ask you...how did you hear about the gig and how did you get the gig?

KR: I am going on my 15th year with Animation, and we have played a ton of package shows together. We’ve played with a lot of other 80s bands like Berlin, A Flock of Seagulls, Wang Chung, and many other 80s bands. Its like a family reunion when we get together. At many of the shows A Flock of Seagulls was the primary headliner, and I would get to stick around and watch the show. Afterwords, all of the bands would hang out, so we became very close, like family.

Just before Christmas this year, Mike Brahm the drummer for A Flock of Seagulls at the time, burned his hands very badly. He was cooking and had a kitchen fire and he burned his hands and wasn’t sure if he was going to be able to come back. So the band called me. Since we had all played together for years, and they saw me substitute for Missing Persons, Tommy Tutone and some other bands, while I was playing for Animation. I guess they thought I was responsible, able to hang out, and that is a very important thing...you can have the ability to play the music, but you have to be able to hang out. Being around each other that man-hours in the day...its really important. So I guess they felt like I was the guy. They called me and asked me to do a show in Vegas in January, and then they asked me to go on this

80s cruise in the Bahamas. We played Boca Raton with Debbie Gibson and Information Society, and then we went on the 80s cruise where we played the Turks and Caicos Islands, St. Thomas and St. Johns, The Bahamas, and Puerto Rico. Then we came back and at that point the drummer was going to come back to finish the gig after his hands were healed..

In September they called me and said Michael is out of the band, he has chosen to take a 5 day week casino gig...So do you want to do the gig? I love the band. The music is cool, I enjoy playing the gigs, but I wanted to make sure it wasn't going to have some conflict with the rest of life. So far things have been really cool.

MIRP: So you subbed for Missing Persons? That's Dale and Terry Bozzio!

KR: Yeah, Dale Bozzio was in the band. Terry and Dale split quite a while ago. So yes, I was Terry's stand in.

MIRP: Wow, that's a bit deal!

KR: Yeah, it's a big deal. It was amazing. I was a huge fan of Missing Persons.

MIRP: and UK?

KR: Wow, yes, UK!

MIRP: I loved UK.

KR: Yes, that's good stuff! I just saw Terry Bozzio at the Douglas Fir two weeks ago here in Portland. He did a workshop. I'm a drum geek fan.

So, in September, they asked if I wanted the gig. I said yes. They came to me with a big bank of shows. There were about 12 shows between September and Christmas. They said, "you don't have to make a final decision; let's see how this goes, let's do these shows through Christmas." I think it took like one show and I said, "Yeah this is great." We did Savannah, Georgia a few weeks ago, came home, then played St. Louis, Chicago, we were supposed to play Orlando on Friday, but it just cancelled. I actually had a show on Saturday here in town, so it was kind of nice that it cancelled. The Flock guys are so fun. They are really fun shows to play.

MIRP: I think it's awesome, I'm so thrilled for you.

KR: Thank you.

MIRP: Are there plans for another album?

KR: I'm not sure. I know the guys in the band are really adept studio musicians. Joe Rodriguez, the guitar player, has a studio and he does a lot of production for other artists. He does everything from country and americana artists to rock and urban type stuff. Mike is doing a lot of recording on his own. He has a solo album that was released recently and I think it's probably just too new in the band for them to divulge that type of information. But, I hope so! I'd love to record with them!

MIRP: I was surprised they only had five studio albums out. I believe 1995 was the last one. Twenty-one years is a very big gap.

KR: Yes. That sounds about right. It is a big span, but Mike just released his solo album.

MIRP: Tell me about your first encounter with A Flock of Seagulls?

KR: I think it was 1989 and the cover band I was playing with in Montana was playing in a bar across from where A Flock of Seagulls were playing at a ski resort. Now here we are 25, 26 years later! And Mike has really toured non stop. It's amazing!

MIRP: I wanted to ask you, where is Mike based out of now?

KR: He lives in Florida half of the year, and in Liverpool for the other half. And he drives everywhere! It's almost like a vacation for him. He purchased an RV, and he drives his van to gigs. I don't know if you heard about the theft he had a couple of years ago. It's all over Youtube. It's a fun one to check out if you haven't seen it. What happened was, they parked the van in a parking garage after a gig and within 30 seconds, someone pulled in...and remember, it's all on video, they jacked the van and took off with it. The band lost all their gear and Mike's new solo record was actually on the computers in the van too. So I know he is a little more secure in how he transports his stuff now. But yeah, he drives everywhere. So Mike is in Florida and the UK, the guitarist is in Florida, the bass player is in San Diego, and I'm here, so when we need to, we kind of all congregate. I fly in, the bass player flies in...

MIRP: Do you have rehearsals or do you know the music so well at this point that you just go to the gig.

KR: We have extended soundcheck and we are at the point now where I've done enough shows where I pretty much know the parts, but it's not like muscle memory yet; it doesn't feel so fluent that we can spontaneously do a bunch of stuff. I'm hoping to get some more time in before the run of shows in December. I think it would be really nice to feel a bit more comfortable.

MIRP: The run of shows in December are all in the states?

KR: Yes, The first week of December will be in Florida and then we play Reno on the 9th. The Florida shows are where they live, so it will be nice to spend time there. Although Mike is back in the UK right now. He left election day...he decided it was a good time to get out of here.

MIRP: Do your kids know how cool this band was in the 80s?

KR: They met A Flock of Seagulls a few years ago at a show I did with Animotion. They definitely know how cool the guys are and they know "I Ran." Grand Theft Auto Vice City had one of Animotion's bigger hits and A Flock of Seagulls' bigger hit on the soundtrack, so most kids their age know of them from video games or commercials, and I think they get it. They have looked at Youtube and have seen the amount of views. My children are really kind of spoiled in that regard. They have gotten to meet so many amazing musicians. Like Jennifer Batten. They didn't even get the magnitude of her time with Michael Jackson, so to them....

MIRP: It's just one of dad's friends?

KR: Yes, really! And it's a good thing. It's a curse and a blessing. I think it's not too cool to be really into what your Dad is into! But I love it! I'm the most blessed person on earth to get to do what I do.

MIRP: Did you ever imagine when you were younger, living in Montana, that you would be doing this...Playing with A Flock of Seagulls?

KR: No...no no no. Not at all. And I felt that way with Animotion also. Those those guys have become family to me. Like I said, I've played for them for about 15 years. They have a new record coming out in a week, by the way.

MIRP: Will you continue to play with Animotion?

KR: Yes.

MIRP: With being in A Flock of Seagulls, can you still have other gigs as long as there is not a conflict?

KR: Yes, as long as there is no conflict. I love playing music so much; it really saves me.

MIRP: In December, when you are scheduled to play in Florida and Reno, is there a bigger schedule or do you have some time off?

KR: A little bit of time. I think there is also a New Years' show.

MIRP: Will you play Portland this winter?

KR: No, there is nothing scheduled. The show with Animotion is the closest. We are playing in February in Everett (Seattle) with Nu Shooz, so we are doing a double bill and I will play with both bands, so that is cool.

MIRP: Do you have a favorite A Flock of Seagulls song?

KR: Space Age Love Song.

MIRP: And they won a grammy in the 80s for the song "DNA." "DNA" was an instrumental?

KR: Yes, its an instrumental.

MIRP: Do you play that song live?

KR: No, it's an interesting thing. I don't know the details behind the grammy...I knew that that was the song they won it for, but I don't know if it was for a movie or how that became the song for the grammy. They have really great songs. You know, "Wishing" is probably up there with "Space Age Love Song" for me. I would say its definitely one of those two songs for me for a favorite.

MIRP: When we talk about the hit singles, "I Ran," "Space Age Love Song," "Wishing," and "The More You Live, The More You Know."...

KR: And "Telecommunication" is another one. I think that was their first hit, and it's surprisingly huge for fans. It's a really driving song and one of the hits that everyone seems to love. It's a difficult song to play, however.

MIRP: While we are on the topic, how difficult are the songs to play technical wise?

KR: It's an interesting thing to play. I'm a rock drummer. I play rock groove. I want to hit hard and play with a real intensity. They want intensity, but they really want it mechanical and driving...with a very industrial feel. So, if I was the drummer for say, Nine Inch Nails, I'd probably be better prepared for this gig.

MIRP: In the 80s songs like "I Ran," were they electronic drums back then?

KR: Not programmed electronic drums, but yes, electronic. Alex (Al) Score, Mike's brother who was the drummer for the band... I'm not sure if he did live performances on the recording, but to me, he sounds like a drum machine.

MIRP: Then you see the videos and they are playing,

KR: Yeah, and kudos to him if he can play that well as if he's a drum machine! Its a difficult thing.

MIRP: Can you say if Mike still has inspirations win a grammy or to have the kind of fame and recognition with new releases that he did previously with songs such as "I Ran" and "DNA"?

KR: You know, I do. For him to put out the solo record I think was a way to test the water to see if his music could stand on its own without the Flock of Seagulls name behind him. He has had to have the band endure on its own without the iconic look that they are known for. I'm just speculating. Mike works a lot on new music in the studio, whether it be for A Flock of Seagulls or for Mike Score. But I do think he is still inspired, so if he wants it to be successful enough to win a grammy, great! I know I like that he doesn't stagnate and just sit on "I Ran" Kudos to him.

MIRP: It is admirable how he's kept it going.

KR: Yeah, that is for sure.

MIRP: What other projects besides Animation and A Flock of Seagulls are you involved in?

KR: I play in a couple of tribute bands with great talent. Shoot to Thrill is an AC/DC tribute band, and Steelhorse Bon Jovi Tribute. Like these other bands I'm in, they are also like family to me, and the thing that is really cool, is community. It's a network of bands, both original and tribute, that have this camaraderie that is untouched. I recently did this thing in Los angeles at Lucky Strike Live. It was an all star jam and I was fortunate enough to get to do the night that Nuno Bettencourt was a curator for.

MIRP: Nuno Bettencourt is from Extreme?

KR: Yes.I got to play with just remarkable players and I watched that night....it was the only time I have ever been in LA where I saw the same type of thing happen that happens here in Portland. That is, where bands help each other. This kind of environment, in this industry is rare. I love the positivity and the sense of community that we have here and I really thrive on getting far way from drama and negativity. This music and this band, A Flock of Seagulls, is a perfect example. All the music you hear takes you back to a time in the 80s where everything was positive and upbeat; there was nothing sad or morose. I'd rather keep the focus on that, you know.

I have tons of respect for this. In bands past when I would do any type of interview, someone in the band would bitch about another band, and it was belittling; talking about someone else to make yourself elevated. It

doesn't do anything but make you look petty. People here get that. There is a lot of mutual respect and admiration and I am so proud of all the bands here that have done well for themselves

MIRP: Kevin, is there anything else that you'd like to talk about?

KR: I'm looking forward to this tour that we have coming up in South America. I've always wanted to go! It's a bucket list item for me to hike Machu Picchu. There was a possibility that I was going to do the South America tour with them if the drummer's hands hadn't healed last June.

MIRP: So you get to go back?

KR: Yes...I have to go! And there is a tentative European tour booked for the summer too. I absolutely love to travel and cant wait to get back to Europe again. I have a lot of friends there from years past, so if there is no new album, at least there will be new destinations! I can't wait.

MIRP: Kevin, it was a pleasure, thank you so much for taking the time and spending it with us. We look forward to seeing you soon.

KR: Yes, I'll see you soon.

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Lover of music. Lover of writing. Music is the audible form of emotion, and I have a deep need to find out what it takes to make a song, an album...a band. When a musician says, "No one has ever asked me that before," or "That was the best interview I've ever done," I know I've done my job right.

We document the live music scene across the Pacific Northwest. As fans first, we strive to make it all come alive for you through our words and pictures.

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