

Innovators of Arena Rock

A progressive rock power trio delivers on the
confident promise of its name

by Suzanne Alyssa Andrew



Photo credit: Greg Kozl

In 1975, a drummer named Gil Moore and a bassist/keyboard player named Mike Levine decided to start a rock trio in Toronto. They added Rik Emmett on guitar and gave their band the name that became their destiny: Triumph.

They steadily earned a loyal audience, significant radio play, gold and platinum album sales and sold-out crowds at massive arena shows. Yet from the very beginning, the band had a vision. They wanted to create a theatrical presence around their blistering blend of high-calibre hard rock songs.

Their bold approach caught the early attention of radio DJs in Texas. Songs from their first two albums, *Triumph* and *Rock 'N' Roll Machine*, were well known in the south, so when Sammy Hagar's band Montrose pulled out of a major show at a 6,000-seat theatre in San Antonio, the promoter gave Triumph a call.

"We had a lucky break, in a scenario that would never happen today," says Moore of that first major show. "We were crazy enough to take a shot and it worked."

"That show proved to us we could handle a big stage and audience. That's something you always have doubts about—can you really do it when the spotlights are on you?" adds Levine. "We delivered and it gave us the confidence to keep going."

What followed was what Emmett describes as a carnival ride through music history. While the world transitioned from AM pop to longer FM cuts by bands like Pink Floyd, Triumph got to work in their studio producing album after album of memorable, FM radio-ready songs like *Never Surrender*, *Just One Night*, *Rocky Mountain Way* and *Lay It on the Line* and show after show of unforgettable high adrenaline performances.

In fact, they were innovators of arena rock, adding light effects, lasers and pyrotechnics to magnify the impact of the music—long before other bands did. They built their own moving lights before those existed, engineered a drum riser that levitated and made a laser light drumkit with matching drumsticks. "That was fundamental to our DNA, to break the wow factor of what we could do onstage," says Moore.

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- Mike Levine

"We wanted to be as unique as we possibly could, both musically and visually, and we certainly set the bar very high for other acts from a stage performance point of view and visuals," says Levine, who adds there was one more key factor to their popularity: "I think part of our success had to do with the fact we were having fun and the audience felt it. It was contagious."

The trio thrived on humour and camaraderie. "There's no way a band survives all the way along that roller coaster ride unless you're feeling like everyone's got each other's back and there's a shared sense of teamwork," says Emmett.

"There's a lot of pressure in the music industry at that level. There's a lot of stress on your body with the travel," says Moore. "The shows themselves pick you up and the fans pick you up but the in-between is a lot of logistics, so humour was the magic for us. Three guys goofing around trying to make each other laugh."

Together they did everything their way, without compromise. "When somebody would say 'no' to us we'd say: 'Oh yeah? Watch this.' If the door was open a crack, we'd drive a semi through it," says Levine.

That attitude, together with their talent and unwavering energy, made an enduring impact on their fans. "We touched a lot of people personally with our music," says Levine. "You can never underestimate the value of what we managed to create through our work and how it affected people."

The band was inducted into the Canadian Music Industry Hall of Fame in 2007 and recognized by the Canadian Music Hall of Fame at the Juno Awards in 2008. The band members now devote time to music advocacy and philanthropy efforts. "When the hubbub of touring is over you start to think of the community and wanting to do things to try to pass the torch forward," says Moore.

The band members say they're grateful to be inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame. "It's amazing and we're incredibly honoured," says Levine. "It's a special group. We got here through hard work and it's nice to be recognized."

