

Rock and Roll means many things to many people, as the diversity of the Class of 2017 clearly illustrates. I started out in 1963, at nine years old, as a jazz drummer. I thank my parents Bruce and Lorraine Smith for finding me an excellent private drum instructor and supporting my musical passion. Back then, my favorite bands were the Count Basie Big Band and the Buddy Rich Big Band. It wasn't until 1969 that I discovered Rock and Roll, when my friend Pudge Greenhalgh, from Cape Cod, showed me his brother Dave's record collection.

He played me Jimi Hendrix, Cream and Led Zeppelin. What I heard was Mitch Mitchell, Ginger Baker and John Bonham, at that moment I could relate to rock drumming and rock music.

Disc Jockey Alan Freed — a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee — once said, "Rock and Roll is really swing with a modern name. It began on the levees and plantations, took in folks songs, and featured blues and rhythm." He said this in the 1950s. Now that we live in a global community, more influences have been added to, and will be added to, the definition of what is Rock and Roll.

For me, one of the most explosive shifts in musical direction came in 1971 with the creation of the Mahavishnu Orchestra with John McLaughlin, Billy Cobham, Jan Hammer, Jerry Goodman and Rick Laird. With drummer Billy Cobham, and a couple years later, Narada Michael Walden stepping into the Mahavishnu Orchestra, jazz officially rocked! In many ways, that funk-rock, jazz-fusion drumming concept was the template for my work with Journey.

I'm grateful for my touring with Ronnie Montrose where we were the support act for Journey in early 1978 and talent scout Neal Schon noticed what I was bringing to Rock and Roll. Later that year, Neal, Steve Perry, Gregg Rolie, Ross Valory and Herbie Herbert invited me to become a Journey band-member, and it's been an educational and rewarding ride!

Thanks to my children Ian and Elizabeth for keeping me in their hearts while I was away on long tours. And very special thanks to my wife Diane. We have been sharing our lives for the last 24 years, I love you dearly. Thanks to Jonathan Cain for the gifted song-writing and Arnel Pineda for keeping the legacy sound of Journey alive and moving forward. And a most important thanks to our fans from around the world that have kept Journey in their hearts and on their stereos.

- Steve Smith of Journey