No blues for Alan Hewitt

Upcoming Event

By Ross Boissoneau

Sun contributor

The Moody Blues are no more, but keyboardist Alan Hewitt isn't slowing down. The band's longtime keyboardist and musical director has turned back to his own band, One Nation. He brings the progressive rock/jazz fusion outfit to the Homestead June 17, opening the second season of the revived Music On The Mountain.

"I'm excited to be on the road with my band, and to be playing in such a beautiful place," says Hewitt.

As a youngster growing up in Petoskey, he absorbed a lot of influences. He and his pals would make the drive to Detroit to see iconic '70s bands at Cobo Hall or Olympia, with artists like King Crimson, Yes, Gentle Giant, Edgar Winter's White Trash and Emerson, Lake and Palmer. He graduated from Petoskey before heading off to Berklee College of Music, where he originally enrolled as a drummer. "I intended to keep on (drumming) at Berklee. Vibes too – Gary Burton was my teacher." While at Berklee, he served as drummer for T-Bone Walker.

He was a huge fan of the fusion outfit Return to Forever and wanted to emulate drummer Lenny White. But instead, he found himself turning to piano as he began working on his degree in composition and arranging. Good bye Lenny, hello Chick Corea.

Coming out of Berklee, Hewitt signed with Warner Brothers, and was pegged as a smooth jazz keyboardist, even appearing on smooth jazz cruises and in a 2007 concert at Dennos Museum Center as such. He still maintained interest in other musical styles, and it was during that period he worked with Donny Osmond, Fee Waybill (the Tubes) and Jane Wiedlin (the Go-Gos), among others.

He played keyboards and did production work with his friend Maurice White on Earth, Wind & Fire albums ("Maurice was a good friend and a mentor," he says), played and produced with Flint's Dick Wagner (Alice Cooper), even recorded with metal's Warrant, writing the band's hit "Cherry Pie" and playing keyboards on the multi-million selling album of the same name.

His music and piano can be heard in films including *Ocean's 13*, *Happy Gilmore*, and *Bridget Jones' Diary*, and he has arranged and composed the theme songs or backing music for more than 50 television programs, including *Oprah*, *The Osbournes*, *Inside the N*FL, and fellow Michiganian Tim Allen's *Home Improvement*.

It was his work on keys that led to his working with Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees the Moody Blues in 2011. "I got a call from the Moody Blues. We had the same management," he says. That led to a nearly decade-long run with the pop/prog pioneers, from 2010 until the band called it quits in 2018.

Following the band's dissolution after drummer Graeme Edge's retirement, Hewitt went on the road with Justin Hayward, the Moody Blues guitarist and vocalist, then for a number of years with Moody bassist John Lodge's 10,000 Light Years band. It was with Lodge that he finally got to work with original Moody Blues members Mike Pinder and Ray Thomas on Lodge's album *10,000 Light Years Ago*.

"Ray was a swashbuckler. He said he wished I'd been in the band when he was," recalls Hewitt.

When Lodge passed away last year, Hewitt was saddened to lose his friend and bandleader, but took the opportunity to work on his own music. Not that he had ever stopped, mind you. As noted, his diverse background includes forays into funk, smooth jazz, hair metal and pretty much anything and anyone who wanted to benefit from his keyboard prowess and production work.

So, he could and has done anything and everything. It's clear he could rest on his laurels, and it's just as clear he has no interest in doing so. Not when there are songs to be written and music to be played.

Alan Hewitt and One Nation perform at the top of Bay Mountain on June 17 at 7 p.m. His band includes fellow northern Michigan natives Duffy King from Indian River on guitar and vocals and Petoskey's Jake Allen on guitar and vocals. Drummer Billy Ashbaugh is, like Hewitt, a former member of the Moody Blues band, and he and King both toured and recorded with Lodge. Bassist David Johnson (the Neville Brothers) rounds out the group.

All Music On The Mountain shows are on Wednesday night. The rest of the season is as follows:

Kevin DiSimone/Hilary James	July 1
Blue Water Ramblers	July 8
Randy Marsh/Cat Daddy	July 22
Jabo Bihlman band	Aug. 5
Seth Bernard w/band	Aug. 12
Joe Taylor	Aug. 19
East Bay Drive	Sept. 9

All shows are at 7 p.m. except East Bay Drive, which begins at 6:30. Tickets are $22 and are available at tinyurl.com/Tickets-MOTM.

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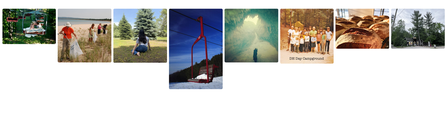

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