



THE HIT MARKER

Toto's main man **David Paich** has been writing super-successful songs for more than 45 years. So why is it only now that he's finally released his first solo album, 'Forgotten Toys'? *Howard Johnson* meets the man with the musical Midas touch to discuss the art of writing, his band's magnificent career, and why he never tries to write a smash...

YOU WOULDN'T HAVE THOUGHT much in the world of music would scare David Paich, would you? After all, at the age of 68, the songwriter and keyboardist with Toto feels comfortable enough in his own skin to service a promo shot of him sitting happily at his piano with the six glowing, golden Grammys he's been awarded neatly arranged across the top of his chosen instrument, a grin spreading from ear to ear. That's the kind of validation of your work that should banish any negative thoughts. But all isn't what it seems.

"It's definitely scary," Paich tells me when we hook up for our interview. "Honestly, it's pretty intimidating to have *my* name on the album sleeve for the first time in my career."

The album in question is 'Forgotten Toys', and amazingly enough it really is the first solo album from a man who's written more hits and sold more records than almost anyone else you may care to mention.

"Well, I've had a decent career," Paich tells me. "But there are people out there like Paul McCartney and Elton John who are breathing their own rarefied air. Those guys are beyond belief. They've written, what, 50 or 60 Top 10 hits, and that's just unbelievable. They're like the Olympic athletes of music."

Paich may be scared by the idea of 'Forgotten Toys', but he also admits to being excited by the world getting to hear his first solo album.

"Toto has been such a great vehicle for most of my songs," Paich says. "It's been a band that's been so full of incredible players, of incredible interpreters of material, that for years I felt satisfied within the band. I didn't feel the *need* to record a solo album. But over the last few Toto records I noticed that I was singing fewer and fewer songs. And I started to notice that because the band has such an incredible singer in Joseph Williams, and because I don't have the range that he does, it was becoming more and more challenging to come up with melodies that worked for me within the context of the band. And that started me thinking about wanting to shed some more light on me as an artist, wanting to do something a little different."

As the title suggests, 'Forgotten Toys' is Paich "having an archaeological dig, going through hundreds and

hundreds of pieces that are stored on [compositional software tools] Pro Tools and Logic, retrieving the pieces that I kept hearing in my head, the ones that whenever I heard them made me feel good. There were bits here and bits there, and I kept telling myself, 'If I can only connect these pieces of the puzzle, this conundrum, then I could put together an album that would really sound great.'"

Despite stepping out on his own as a solo artist, Paich was nevertheless quick to involve his Toto bandmates Joseph Williams and guitarist Steve Lukather in making 'Forgotten Toys'. Wasn't there just the slightest temptation to cut the Toto umbilical cord completely and truly strike out?

"Well I always kind of thought I wanted the guys involved," Paich tells me. "When I was first starting to get this project together, I found myself thinking about Ringo Starr's solo career, probably because Steve Lukather played on Ringo's last studio album [2019's 'What's My Name']. I found it interesting that on his solo projects he still had the other Beatles guys contributing [notably on the 1973 album 'Ringo']. And I thought to myself, 'Well, if that's the way The Beatles do their solo records, then it won't hurt for me to bring in some of my

crew I have history with. There's a lot of comfort in my little musical club – and you can move so much faster when you have history with people."

"I brought Joseph Williams in as a co-producer on four of the album's seven songs ['willibelongtoyou', 'Spirit Of The Moonrise', 'First Time', and 'Queen Charade'] and the chemistry between us was just magnificent, both musically and personally. We understand each other so well that we often finish each other's sentences, and both he and Steve Lukather were really supportive of me recording a solo album during the pandemic. They both put out solo albums in 2021, so in some ways they were waiting for me to bring up the rear."

TOTO'S 45-YEAR career reputation has been built on the outstanding musicianship of a band that was created from session musicians, so perhaps Paich was never going to leave Lukather and Williams out of the equation. After all, when you've got the best talent on board already, what's the incentive to change?

"I've been spoiled my whole life where musicians



Photo: Alessandro Solca