



Episode 1,409: The Progressive Rock Episode, with Big Big Train's David Longdon

Guest: David Longdon & Brad Birzer

**WOODS:** Brad and I are just delighted to be talking to you. And my kids are envious. My daughters, of which I have five, have heard you in the car so many times. They know "Uncle Jack" and "The First Rebreather" and "Hedgerow" and "Summoned by Bells" by heart. And I think you're one of the strongest rock vocalists I've ever heard. I think you're just tremendous. And then in preparation for this, I looked at your Wikipedia entry, and you play like 800 instruments. So what's your background? How did you get started?

**LONGDON:** Well, I was born in Nottingham, in the Midlands, and my father was a carpenter, he was a joiner, and he worked on those sorts of things. My mom worked in the TechStars industries in Nottingham. And music was something that was important. It was considered very important culturally when I was growing up, it seemed to be, something that I particularly gravitated towards. My mom says that her father was a musician.

And those days, you know, the opportunities weren't really there to pursue it. So from a young age, from about eight, I started learning to play the piano and other keyboard-type things. So that's how I started. So I think playing the keyboard's a good thing, because it gives you lots of ideas of harmony. And you can see the harmony in patterns as it moves around; as you move your fingers around the keyboard, it's very easy to see the harmonies.

And it's when I got to the age of 14, I realized that I kind of wasn't an orchestral player. And I started playing flute in the school orchestra, because we had to play an orchestral instrument to do that. So although I was sight reading, I started doing the folk rock band when I was 14, and we started playing in bars and pubs and things, which was, that was good fun. So I kind of am one of those sorts of musicians.

And then after that finished, I formed my own band of school friends. And after we played a few covers, there was a need for original material, we thought, so I was the one that was most likely to be able to provide it, so I started writing songs. And that's how it started, really. I would consider myself to be a songwriter, a singer and a songwriter, first and foremost. So the musical instruments tend to be things that come along in order to flesh out the songs, if that makes sense. That's why I play them.

**WOODS:** Now, we could spend some time getting into the background of Big Big Train and how it got started, but we have you for only so much time and I selfishly want to focus on things that I think are most likely – well, first of all, that interest me, that I also think are going to get people to start listening to you guys, because I think if people are not listening to Big Big Train – and I'm not even exaggerating – I think your life is worse. I genuinely think

your life is worse than if you listened. And in fact, a couple years ago, I did a little promotion where I took some of my top donors who support my show, and I just sent them copies of *English Electric: Full Power*, which I think may be the best album I've ever heard. And I've spent my entire life listening to material like this. So can I ask you: do you do something else full-time other than Big Big Train?

**LONGDON:** I used to teach music technology for about 12, 13 years. That's when I had a young family. But after that, I worked part time – I just do like menial work. I work part-time in a convenience store. So it just gets me a few hours in pay, helps me keep the bills in. But no, I only do about 18 hours a week in there now. So if I'm not doing Big Big Train – it looks like it's heading more that way, which is fine.

**WOODS:** All right, that's tremendous. I'm going to turn things over to Brad for a minute.

**BIRZER:** David, it's so good to finally meet you. I know we've corresponded a few times, and of course, I've corresponded with Greg, but I've never talked to him either, so it's wonderful to be able to connect. And I've been listening to you now for ten years. I mean, this is exactly ten years – Tom and I were talking about this yesterday – I heard of you from my friend, Carl Olsen, who works for Ignatius press, and then I was the one who told Tom about you, as far as I know, so it's nice to have these links one to another. So again, thank you for being on and doing this.

So David, I want to follow up on Tom's question. And I'd like to ask a kind of broader question, and that is, when you work with Big Big Train – and obviously you and Spawton have an incredible musical relationship. How do you see yourself as a member of a band versus what you did on your solo album – especially when you're talking about playing the flute and recognizing that you're really not an orchestral type, it's clear you fit in incredibly well in a tightknit band. So can you give us a little bit about that process, not only from your personal perspective, but maybe from a broader perspective of how it might work in the band dynamic?

**LONGDON:** Well, it does vary a little bit, because we have different ways of writing. Although Greg and I have written together in the past, on recent records, we tend to write apart – other than, we wrote together on the record on *Grimspound* and "A Mead Hall in Winter." I wrote the melody; Greg wrote the words. And the same thing's happened with Nick D'Virgilio on the new record, "Theodora in Green and Gold."

And so the way I fit into it is usually, obviously something like a flute is a very melodic thing, so I can add counterpoint melodies to it, and I do write things down, because I've got older – I mean the good thing about having a formal musical education is that you can write notation, and so it's actually really useful for working out parts alongside something. So I think what I try to do if I'm working on other people's material is I'll try to do something that enhances the work. And it can be anything, because I tend to really like production, as well. I enjoy the role that I do in Big Big Train with the production of the songs I'm working on. And so I will do anything that I think enhances the song. We've got a rule in Big Big Train, which is whoever writes the song has the sort of like veto on what they think works or –

**BIRZER:** Oh, nice, okay.

**LONGDON:** I think it makes it easier. Otherwise, I don't think anything's kind of good by committee. You have to have someone with a vision of what's actually happening. So that makes it a lot easier, so we will run ideas past the actual songwriter in these instances. But it's just really serving the songs. It's making sure that – when I'm working on a Greg thing, when I'm doing vocals on Greg's stuff, he'll give me guide vocals, but he is very good with the saying, you know, "Can you give me a big vocal moment here?" and eventually I'll just react to that, and eventually we'll choose one of them that we think is the best one, that kind of thing. So there's a lot of trust, because we've worked together a long time, and there's a lot of trust in each other within the band. So for example, if we're putting drums down, I'm quite happy to let Nick do his thing, because he knows kind of the sort of stuff that we like, and of course because we've spoken about it. We've sat in studios when he's been doing the drums, and there's an element of trust there in the relationship there. We know that Nick will be in the ballpark certainly.

**BIRZER:** Sure.

**LONGDON:** And it's the same for all of us, really. There's a lot of trust between the members of the band, musical trust between members of the band. Greg's songs tend to be a little bit more open-ended in the demo phases, and so he will – they're not as nailed down as mine, but I come from a kind of songwriting background where I was signed as a songwriter to Rondor Music UK, and that's the publishing arm of A&M Records, Alpert & Moss back in the day, so they've got bands like The Carpenters, Supertramp, Sting, all those sorts of things. And so I'm used to kind of like nailing things down very specifically, because that's just the background I come from. So my demos tend to be quite developed.

**BIRZER:** Yeah, so David, one of the reasons I was asking – and then I'll let Tom take back over after you answer this – but I'm really, when I watch you guys – so I've never actually been in concert to see you live, but when I've watched your live performances online, I'm always struck by how it's clear that Greg is this kind of just, he's a great pillar there in the middle of everything, and things kind of revolve around him. You're clearly the lead in terms of being the voice, as well as the face of the band, but it strikes me that you two kind of establish these twin pillars, and everything else kind of rotates around it. And it does seem to me, at least, that that trust is almost palpable from the standpoint of a listener or a watcher. And I find that one of the most amazing things, because it comes, at least as I'm watching you, as close to jazz as I've ever seen a rock band.

**LONGDON:** Oh, wow, okay. Danny will be very pleased with that [laughing].

**BIRZER:** [laughing] Okay.

**LONGDON:** He's a real jazzer. Yeah, and I think we all bring different qualities to different things. For example, Dave Gregory and Danny Manners, they're good ensemble players, and Danny is good at developing and arranging things around things. So we've all got our skills, but at least the twin pillars of Greg and I, yeah, so I guess it's because, since I joined the band back in 2009 – yes, it has been we're kind of at the center of it. Really, yeah, we do. I'd agree with that, and so would Greg..

**BIRZER:** Yeah, that's beautiful. Thanks, David.

**WOODS:** All right, I'd like to ask, given that over the past few years, of course, the progressive rock community has started to hear more and more about you guys and the word has started to get out a bit more, but do you consider yourself to be a musician in the progressive rock tradition? Do you consider what Big Big Train is doing to be progressive rock? And if so, what does that term mean to you?

**LONGDON:** Okay, well – okay, well, yes, I do. Big Big Train, Greg and I, we're very proud to be progressive rock musicians. The nicest thing about working in the progressive genre is that it can be what you make it, in many ways. I think, because progressive rock doesn't kind of exist in its own bubble, usually things impact upon it. So for example, Brad mentioned jazz earlier on. There's certainly a lot of that in there. There's rock, obviously. There's psychedelic rock and electronica and all sorts of things that have come down, classical music, particularly, the way the songs form extended forms and things like that.

So it's a great vehicle to be a musician within, and it affords us to be able to write extended pieces of music. It's very much a – I guess working on a progressive rock album or a long progressive rock track is akin to working on a novel or something like that, with the amount of detail and research that goes into the subject matter. And then you've got the musical developments, with the way the themes develop throughout the piece and the way that the piece illustrates the narrative, the music illustrates the narrative of the story. So that's what it means to me. It means that it's a really adventurous sonic playground, to be a progressive rock musician. We've never been a band that shied away from being tagged progressive, because that's what we are, and that's it.

**WOODS:** Yeah, I ask that because there are some bands that, as you know, that the term is almost radioactive to them, maybe because they think, for some people, it just sets off alarm bells, like they think about Spinal Tap and bands that are trying too hard, you know?

**LONGDON:** [laughing]

**WOODS:** But to me, I love the genre. And I guess I was going to ask you this as a question, but it would have been such a leading question, I'll just say it as a statement.

**LONGDON:** Okay.

**WOODS:** I have friends who are very dear to me, who are very, very intelligent, and yet their entire musical experience consists of pop songs by Billy Joel. Now look, when you want to listen to a pop song, there's nobody better. He wrote amazing melodies that are very memorable. He was very successful. I'm not trying to put him down.

**LONGDON:** No.

**WOODS:** But you're depriving yourself of something really, really special if that's your exposure to what music is. And I mean, to hear what you guys have done, again, has added such joy to my life. It's not just that I tap my feet a little bit listening, and then that's the end of it. Listening to "Curator of Butterflies" is a really amazing experience. It's not like "Uptown Girl." There's so much more to it.

**LONGDON:** It's not like "Uptown Girl" [laughing]. No, it's not. But yeah, that's the thing. But people come to music for very different reasons, and it fulfills very different needs in their lives, and I think it's just each to their own, really, Tom. It's just each to their own. And, yeah, we're lucky that we have people that believe in what we do and like it enough to enable us to continue to do it.

**WOODS:** Let's talk about the new album, *Grand Tour*. Now, as I've said, I jumped on board the train, so to speak, at *English Electric*, which impressed me musically and lyrically. The scenes that are painted there of life in England are scenes that could be painted by people only who had really had those experiences. And it was subject matter that we don't really encounter very much in music these days, so that also drew me in. Well, here, the subject matter is very distinct and obvious. I'm just interested in how you decided on what you decided on for *Grand Tour*, where it really is a grand tour of Europe.

**LONGDON:** Okay, well, the notion to do the grand tour, the title came after – well, Greg and I are kind of continually writing most of the time, because you just do, you know? It's not something that you switch off; it's something that keeps going, or you get ideas, or we'll go and see things individually and sometimes together. We'll go off and look at something, and we'll be struck by a certain thing. So already, this process has begun now for the next album. So Greg and I are already kind of like building together themes, if you like, things that suddenly connect. I don't know, it's a bit like – it's an odd thing when you're working on a record, because suddenly you get these connections with other things. Other things seem to spring out of the woodwork, almost like coincidentally, but they're not. It's the fact that, because you're working on a particular theme, then something else will happen.

For example, Greg had been doing a lot of traveling in Europe, and he'd been visiting Rome quite a lot. So that's why his interest in Rome over the last few years has developed. So it was inevitable that he was going to do that. *Grand Tour* also coincided with us being offered to headline Loreley in Germany, as well. So we found ourselves suddenly having to deal with voyaging across to Germany and bringing the band out there and doing it, learning how to go to foreign places. And it was amazing. It was an amazing experience. So we knew this was on the horizon, so that flavored the album; in parts of it anyway, it flavored the album.

So that's what it's like; it's just pulling themes together. So Greg will say, "I'm writing about this," and then I'll say, "Oh, I'm writing about this." So it's interesting because we both cross-reference ourselves a little bit, as well, within a song. And so that's nice, because, again, we keep making – for example, on "Voyager," for example, I wrote a song on *Grand Tour* called "Ariel," and Greg's got one called "Voyager" about the voyage of space. And one of the moons that "Voyager" took detailed accounts of is a planet called Ariel. So these little things suddenly have these resonances and connections, things like that.

But yeah, we eventually decide what kind of things we're writing, and then we'll decide quite quickly in that process of a title. And I think in the instance of the *Grand Tour*, I liked the idea of the grand tour being sort of in the 19th century, or really the last 200 years, so the 18th- and 19th-century pursuit of well-to-do young British people going out into Europe. It's a bit like a rite of passage to go and visit different things to broaden the mind. And also in some cases, if they were about to inherit titles, to actually kind of sow their wild oats before they came back to the UK to take up their duties in either the government or gentry or whatever. And so I mentioned that to Greg, and he thought that was a good idea. And all we needed – the grand tour really is just an arc, a story arc, something that we could hang these stories

on. It's not a step-by-step guide to Europe and things like that, because most people's grand tours were very different. For example, Lord Byron's tour was very off the beaten track. It wasn't all the usual places. It was different thing.

But that's it. So once we've got the story in place, and once you've got the title of the album, it's a bit like putting – I often liken this to putting the name on the front of a bus or something like that. When you've got a bus and you've got the name onto it, you kind of know where you're headed, and that kind of consolidates lots of the ideas. And that's how we do it. So that's it. Once the title's in place, we're off.

**WOODS:** Brad has written a nice review of *Grand Tour*, so Brad, in a second, I'm going to let you pick up the conversation. But I'll say, I'm one of these listeners who knows nothing about music. So when you guys are doing all these clever things, I have no idea how clever it is. I just know it sounds really nice. So I'm sure you're up to things that are really impressive and amazing. But I want Brad to talk in particular about this current release, *Grand Tour*, a bit because Brad's been with Progarchy for a long time, and I think as long as I've been following Big Big Train, Brad gets mentioned in the liner notes every darn time. It makes me envious.

**BIRZER:** I'm always very proud of that. I will admit that. David, thank you, your answers are just fantastic, and it's drawing me in all kinds of places I wasn't expecting to go this morning. But two of the things you said, that when you look at music, you think of "each to their own," and you also think of this Sonic playground – but when I think a Big Big Train – and both of those things, I think are clear, but there's a real optimism or an uplift in the way that you present music that, as far as I've seen, never becomes pretension. It's always just so earnest and honest. And I like thinking of Big Big Train – I mean, prog is great, and I've been a prog rocker since as far back as I can remember. But I often think of Big Big Train as actually taking things to the next step beyond prog. And that is, it strikes me that so much of what you're doing is really intelligent, serious music for intelligent, serious people, and without it ever being pretentious. So I'm curious, is that just your personality? And I know that could be a loaded question. But do you and Greg sit around and think, *Well, this would be a great topic, and we need to explore this because it's a Big Big Train topic*, or is it really more just an expression of what you two are interested at the moment, and it's then an earnest manifestation of that?

**LONGDON:** Well, we're like that. That's a lot of the conversations that Greg and I have. We're not trying to be something that we're not, Brad. That's the point. One of the things I've learned in life is that people can get very wised out very quickly. And both Greg and I are 53 at the moment, and we're at the point where we've got to be true to ourselves. It's being true to yourself and writing about things that stir us. So yeah, it's us. It's not contrived. We don't try to be Big Big Train; it's the way we are. We are Big Big Train. So it's not something that we have to work hard at.

**BIRZER:** Yeah, no, that's a perfect answer. So I'm about a year and a half younger than you guys; I figured we were roughly the same age. So let me ask about *Grand Tour*, and I loved Tom's question about it. Where do you see it in – so I started with you guys – and obviously I have everything now, but I started with you with *Underfall Yard*. And I've been able to watch over ten years your trajectory, and then of course projecting backwards, as well. So *Grand Tour*, I have to admit, the first time I listened to it, I just wasn't sure what was going on, and even the second time. And it really took until Tom and I talked about it for it to really click with me. And then once it clicked, I thought, oh my gosh, this is just genius. And I'm there

now, but I am still kind of surprised that you chose to write about a European topic. Especially since Big Big Train is so identified with England, do you see yourselves going into the next album – could it go in a totally different direction? You know, here on this album, you went back in time, you go forward in time, you go out in space, you go back in space. Is this just what we should expect in future releases?

**LONGDON:** I don't know. It's all to be had. It depends which way the wind blows; it depends on what we feel like writing, what strikes us. There's more stuff to be discussed, we think. I mean, we've already got ideas for the next record, so we'll just – you know, you follow your muse. You go where it leads you. That's another thing, as well, just being open to where it takes you. I do think *Grand Tour* is – just coming back to saying that it takes you a few times to listen to it, that we wanted to do that. This time around, it took an awfully long amount of time to write. The writing process seemed to go on a lot longer than it had in any of the earlier albums.

**BIRZER:** Oh, that's interesting. Okay.

**LONGDON:** I think that's because we were trying to not fall back into the traps of doing the same old, same old. Because we were also going out into Europe, doing Loreley, and we're looking at doing the States next year, and looking into all of that. Or you know, we're planning to do that. It's at that point. And it's this idea of reaching out, so it's the idea of a very kind of culturally English-based band, even though Nick's from the States and Rikard's from Sweden – it's the idea of us traveling, going out, seeing the world and living life, embracing life while it's there to be had. That was the motive behind it. But *Grand Tour* is a very dense record. There's a lot of it. There's a lot to listen. You can go in as deep as you like. And that was the thing. We were building layer upon layer of kind of depth and intrigue. So superficially, you could listen to something like "Theodora," or you could listen to "Alive," and yeah, that's quite a happy, little toe-tapping song.

**BIRZER:** Yes, it is. No doubt about that.

**WOODS:** Yeah, as a matter of fact, in preparation for this, I got an advanced copy of the album. So it so happened, I was in New York City at the time, and I was walking down the streets of Manhattan, and "Alive" would come on my iPod, and I'm telling you, that combination of the bustle of the city and taking a brisk walk and having "Alive" play in the background, and you're in a city that for all its flaws is full of life – it is full of life – and when you really enjoy all the good things about the city – the theater and the culture and just the vibrancy – it is great to be alive. And with that song playing in the background, it was such a nice setting for my trip there.

I can't help asking, and I hope this doesn't come out the wrong way, but over the past few years, Steven Wilson has started to break out a little bit more into the mainstream. And yet still, most people have never heard of him, but yet, he's much, much better known than he was before. And I want Big Big Train to have that moment. I consider it to be seriously one of the most – and I'm not saying this to kiss up to the guest. I don't kiss up to my guests. But for heaven's sake, I think you guys are producing some of the best music I have ever heard, and it is a crime that you guys aren't a household name, and that instead, just the most forgettable pap is all over the airwaves. Do you ever find that frustrating?

**LONGDON:** No, because there's nothing I can do about it [laughing].

**WOODS:** That's just the right attitude.

**LONGDON:** You know, the world is what it is, and things either strike a chord at a particular time. I don't feel like I'm owed a living, and I don't feel like I'm owed it by any particular right or claim on it. I think it finds its natural balance in things. It is what it is, and we are where we are. Yeah, I would like to – obviously we want to grow the band. We want to be able to be more successful. We want to be able to tour more and see more of the world and write the things we love. We're currently looking to develop the label, as well, in terms of productions, and I'm working on a record with Judy Dyble, who's the first singer at Fairport Convention. And I've been writing with Judy for a few years, and so that's something that's going to come out on English Electric. So there's lots of things to be happening. I don't feel bitter or twisted that – you know, it is what it is. And the age I am, I'm very – and same for Gregory. We know who we are, and we're just making the best music that we can. And thank you for saying that you think the music's some of the best music you've heard. And that's genuinely very, very – I'm pleased you think that way. All we're trying to do is just make the best records we can, with what we've got, while we can. And that's it. It's quite simple, really. It's not a difficult thing.

**WOODS:** I would say that you guys are, in addition to being like – it's not just thinking-man's music, although Brad is right about that. It certainly is. But it's also a musician's music, in the sense that when I've promoted Big Big Train to my audience, what I've found is the people who are the most accomplished themselves as musicians are the ones who most appreciate what you're doing. And in fact, a friend of mine, James Newcomb, who has a musical podcast, had you on as a guest some time ago, and he heard about you through me.

**LONGDON:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** And he's very knowledgeable about music. So the musicians listen to what you're doing, and say: oh, my gosh, how have I not heard of this group before? So I just wanted to add that in. Brad, let's ask a couple more things before we wrap up, just about the new album. First of all, David, what's the exact release date on it?

**LONGDON:** It's going to be on May, the 17th, is the exact release date.

**BIRZER:** Two days.

**WOODS:** Okay, yeah, two days from when we're recording, but by the time people hear this, it will be released, so they'll have no further excuse not to get it. All right, Brad, over to you.

**LONGDON:** Oh, well, it's –

**BIRZER:** Go ahead, David, I'm sorry.

**LONGDON:** – Greg's birthday, as well. The release date for the *Grand Tour* is the same day as Greg's birthday.

**WOODS:** Terrific.

**BIRZER:** That's great. David, it's fun listening to you. I think I like you guys even better than I did 35 minutes ago. This is great. So I want to ask too – and I love this news that you're bringing in that you're going to do something with the label, and you're taking things further. That's just excellent. I loved your responses. So following up on what Tom just asked, how do you want to come into America? How do you guys want to come here? Are you going to come here on the *Grand Tour* tour? Are you thinking it'll be the next album? And how many cities are you looking at when you come to North America?

**LONGDON:** We're planning at the moment, Brad, so we're looking at how we're going to do that. We've got to think about getting everybody over. We've got to look at whether or not – you know, how the brass will figure in, which it will figure in, but we're just wondering whether or not to bring our own brass guys with us, or maybe hire musicians from the States' side. We don't know yet. The great thing about having Nick in the States is that we can get things moving that way. We've been announced to play at a particular festival, as well, in the States, in Florida, so that's good. So that's how we'll do it. But in terms of what we'll bring, I don't know about you, but I think we're almost going to do sort of a Big Big Train kind of "greatest hits" sort of thing. Rather than it being just solely songs from *Grand Tour*, we're probably going to play songs that people would probably expect us to sing, stuff that has put us where we are, kind of thing. So we'll probably do something like that. That's the strategy so far.

**BIRZER:** That sounds wonderful. So a band that I like quite a bit and I think Tom does as well, Glass Hammer, which comes out of Tennessee here, I know even when they tour in the United States, they almost always hire college bands or college choirs to work with them so that wherever they go, they've got built-in musicians there. And I could definitely see you guys doing that. As you come over, I think that would be a great way to mix with some not only people who know what they're doing here in the US, but people that you could trust and support. So yeah, I'm really, really looking forward to that, David. I think that's going to be fantastic, just wonderful. I'll probably be a groupie and just follow along from place to place.

So yeah, let me ask another question about *Grand Tour*. And it strikes me – and I don't know if this was you or Greg, but how do you guys decide on song arrangements? So this one on *Grand Tour* struck me a lot like what you did on *English Electric*. So *English Electric* – and you and I had corresponded about this, David, though it's been a while – I felt like it started with this kind of childhood enthusiasm, justly so, and it ends with basically the end of life. You've got the whole life cycle there. On the *Grand Tour*, we start in space and then end up in home. And I'm curious if that was intentional on your part. Do you work with Rob Aubrey as you're thinking about which way the songs go? How do you guys decide that?

**LONGDON:** Okay, well, it's devised between Greg and I, and then we will kind of like find the story arcs between them. But Greg's very attentive to running order and things like that. That's something that he likes to do. But yeah, basically, it's Greg and I that will decide on how it goes. We also arrange the songs, as well, not unless we get someone else in, for example, Danny or something like that. And Greg will say, "Oh, could you arrange this bit for that?" I think some of the strings on "Voyager," Danny did the string charts, and we went into Abbey Road Studios to record the strings. You know, it's that kind of thing. So we've got some very talented people in Big Big Train. Of course, Rachel does the string arrangements as well. That's how it works. But no, it's usually in house. We don't have anybody external coming in and doing it. We do it ourselves.

**BIRZER:** Right, yeah. And please only answer this if you can, David. I'm curious as a business, do you guys have equal shares? Are you shareholders in Big Big Train? Or do you do things by how things come in and then you divide profits?

**LONGDON:** We've got a company. We're a limited company called Big Big Train Limited, and Greg and I are the directors of that company, and the rest of musicians are paid.

**BIRZER:** Yeah, okay. Well, thank you for answering that. That may have been an awkward question, but I appreciate knowing that.

**WOODS:** You know what? Let me jump in with an unrelated question. How do you feel about streaming services? Because we hear a lot of musicians complaining about them, that they don't earn very much and they feel like they're being exploited. What's your – by the way, the first Big Big Train song I heard was on Pandora. I heard "The First Rebreather," and for most progressive music, I have to listen to it ten times before I really get it; that one I loved instantly, and it was through Pandora.

**LONGDON:** Okay, well, it certainly a double-edged sword type of thing. You know, we are aware of these things. I think like Spotify and downloading and things like that, just because some people download stuff doesn't necessarily – people think, *Ah, they're ripping it off the net*. It's one thing having it. Progressive rock fans, in our experience, tend to like the actual article. So within our genre, they will like the package, which is why we put a lot of thought and attention into the artwork, we why we work with Sarah Ewing, our artist. We try and make the things as desirable as possible so that people will want that, because we know that people in our genre like those sorts of things. ecause Of course, you said, Tom, you were listening to – you check things out, and I think that's good thing for Spotify in the sense if people want to kind of be exposed to new music. But I'm from a generation – maybe you're asking the wrong person. I'm from a generation where I actually like the artifacts, as well. I like the packaging. You can get some beautifully made musical products these days. You just do.

And so each to their own, really. If Spotify helps more people listen to our music, then fine. When we went to Loreley, we were struck by the age difference in Europe of people who'd come see us. There's a lot more younger people into progressive rock music. And we noticed that there was quite a lot of young people wearing Big Big Train merch coming in to Loreley, with our merch, on T-shirts and things like that. So I'm not sure how they're hearing material. And the good thing about it, as well, is I think a lot of these kinds of sites – like, I'm sure Spotify and many others actually keep data in terms of who's buying it or who's downloading it and what from where. So that's really useful to kind of build up a profile, so we can see from country to country who's kind of buying a music. So it's a double-edged sword. I think it's just one of the perils of being a musician in the 21st century. But it's got good things about it, and it's got bad things about it.

**WOODS:** Right, right. All right, Brad, let's each ask one more question. Mine is a question I actually asked Ian Anderson back on Episode 3 of this show. This is episode number 1409, so this was a while ago that I had Ian Anderson on. But I asked him: when you look back at the chart history of some of the early Jethro Tull albums, but particularly the two they did where the entire album was one song, *Thick as a Brick* and *A Passion Play*, those both reached number one on the Billboard charts in the United States, which is an astonishing thing. I mean, they did have radio edits, but even so, I'd consider that an impossibility today, that you

would release an album that's clearly progressive, that's challenging to the listener, the whole album is one song, and they reached number one.

And I asked him: how do you account for that when we know full well that today, that could never happen? And I get very defensive when it comes to my music. I want my musicians to be successful and world famous, and it annoys me when they're not always that way. And so what I was trying to get him to say was: well, people have gotten stupider [laughing]. Something like that. And that's just not his style. He wasn't taking the bait. And I don't think that's David's style, either. But I am curious to know, David, what do you think has changed, that that seems like something from another planet to us today, and yet it did happen. What's different between then and now?

**LONGDON:** I guess, because at that time in the music industry, in order to get your music out, you had to be signed to a label. You had to have the weight of the label. And there were only a few sources where you could get that music from, which for them in money terms, it was like shooting fish in a barrel. You know, they've got a captive audience. And I think because you're talking about things like *Thick as a Brick* and *Passion Play*, which followed on the heels of each other as well – it wasn't like they did it and then did a few kind of standard-formatted records in between. They did them on the heels of each other, which is an odd thing. So what's changed I think in music is the way that people listen to music and the way that people interact with music these days. I mean, I don't know. Could you release an album today where it's just one long, continuous track? In terms of format, you could, because in the olden days, it would have been split into half by vinyl. So you got *Thick as a Brick*, part one, *Thick as a Brick*, part two, simply because of the limitations of the format. And that's just talking about vinyl. But you could do an album where it is just literally a continuous piece of music, like whatever, a 50-minute piece music if you wanted to do that. Imagine mixing it, though. That'd be a nightmare.

But as far as why they got away with it then, I think it's because the labels have put time and money into developing the bands. The bands were continually on tour on both sides of that album, for a long time, and I think it's because they were trying to do something a bit different, something – Ian Anderson certainly said about *Thick as a Brick*. It was on the heels of – was it *Aqualung*, I think, before *Thick as a Brick*?

**WOODS:** Yeah.

**LONGDON:** They thought that was a concept record. It's a song cycle, I guess, but it's got themes that connect it together. But he thought in *Thick as a Brick* he would give them the mother of all concept albums. That's what his idea was. I don't know. Maybe that could be the next record? Maybe Big Big Train could make that one continuous –

**WOODS:** Oh, wouldn't that be great? I'd love that [laughing]. If that happens, I take full credit for it. All right, Brad, one final question from you.

**BIRZER:** Yeah, David, thank you so much for all of this, your time, everything. You're so gracious. I really appreciate it. And it's nice to be able to talk to one of my musical heroes, too. So my final question is this. Obviously, 50 years from now, probably none of us will be here, but somebody will take our place, and somebody will be writing the history of rock music over the previous hundred years. How would you like to be remembered in the history of rock music 50 years from now?

**LONGDON:** Oh, that's a tricky question, Brad.

**BIRZER:** [laughing] It was meant to be.

**LONGDON:** How would I like to be remembered? I would like to be remembered fondly and affectionately by my daughters. How I'm remembered for the music I do, it's whatever. It's whatever, whatever gets written about us or however I'm remembered. I don't know. I'm not going to be around to pick anybody –

**BIRZER:** David, that was a perfect answer. Thank you. Great.

**WOODS:** Well, I want to urge people to check out the new album, of course, *Grand Tour*. BigBigTrain.com is the website. I'm going to link to the album. I'm also going to link to – I know I shouldn't, because we're supposed to be – you know, your marketing people will be upset at me because we're supposed to focus on *Grand Tour*. But doggone it, I have to link to *English Electric*. As long as I have people's attention, I'm also going to link to that at TomWoods.com/1409. And this is your great entry point into a band that has given me tremendous joy, my children, Brad Birzer, who has impeccable taste 90% of the time – I'd say nine out of 10 times. Every once in a while there's a dud coming from Brad. But honestly, if it hadn't been for Brad, again, my life would not be as happy as it is. So I want people who normally trust me on other things, on things involving world historic happenings, forget all those. This is really where you need to trust me, right here, on a way that is going to improve your life. So I hope you continue to get more exposure, have great success with it. And as Brad says, thanks so much for your time.

**LONGDON:** You're welcome. Thank you, Tom. Thanks for speaking today. I've enjoyed it. Thank you, Brad.

**BIRZER:** Oh, thank you.

**LONGDON:** It's been fun. I've enjoyed it. Thank you.