

# BOBBY KIMBALL

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## Interview with Fransesco Licurgo

**You started playing piano at 4 and at 8 you were already performing in a band...at that early age did you already know that playing, writing & performing live was going to be your life?!**

That is some very true information Francesco. Now I know that you must have read the Interview I sent to Domenico at GGM Studios. I did begin playing Piano, and I began Writing Songs, when I was only 5 Years Old. Then, I started my First Band when I was only 8 Years Old. I have always played with so many Bands since I was only 8 Years Old. Doing so many Concerts when I was so young, and I now do a ton of Concerts and Tours all over the World since I was only 18 Years Old. Playing, Writing, and Performing Live Concerts has always been the most fantastic thing for me to do for my whole Life. I love to see so many people in the Crowd having a lot of fun, and enjoying the Music that I'm doing. It is the best thing for me to do my friend.

**Growing up in Louisiana gave you many opportunities to perform live right?**

That is the truth about growing up in Louisiana. I played with some of the best Musicians on Planet Earth in Louisiana. I was in about 10 Bands while I grew up in Louisiana. Some of the best fun I had was with a Band called "Machine". We lived in New Orleans for almost 3 Years, and we played Concerts on Bourbon Street for 7 Nights a Week at a great Club on Bourbon Street. That was so much fun for me. Before I was with that "Machine" Band, when I was just 15 to 21 Years Old, I was with "The Blues Kings" Band. That Band had a 5-Piece Horn Section. It was a Fantastic Band, and we were playing so many Huge Clubs that held about 8,000 people, and those Clubs were about 4 miles from my Home Town, (Vinton) in Louisiana, which was right on The Texas Border. Those Clubs were so Huge, and there were so many of those Clubs. The reason there were so many Huge Clubs, only 4 miles West of Vinton, and 4 miles East of The Texas Border, was because the Drinking Age in Texas was 21 Years Old, and the Drinking Age in Louisiana was only 18 Years Old. So many people from Texas would come to those Clubs on the Weekend because of that Drinking Age difference. I always had a lot of fun playing with so many great Musicians while I was living in Louisiana.

**Tell us about leaving Louisiana to sing in a band called Three Dog Night...was this a life changing decision in your career?**

For 3 Years, I had been playing with "The Levee Band" from Louisiana, and I got a Phone Call from a good friend of mine that I had played in 2 Bands with. He was a very good Saxophone Player named Jon Smith. He told me that the Singers of "The Three Dog Night" Band had just quit, and 3 of the Musicians, the Bass Player, The Drummer, and the Guitarist, had decided to form another Band. The Name of that Band was: "S.S.Fools". Jon was asked to join that Band, and he called me and asked me to move to Los Angeles, CA. to Sing with the "S.S.Fools" Band. I moved to Los Angeles in 1974 to play with them, and I was having so much fun. We rehearsed for about 2 months when I arrived, and at about 1/3 of those rehearsals, Jeff Porcaro and David Paich had come there to hear that Band. We only did One Album, and I was with them for about 15 Months. After I left that Band, I played with 6 different Bands from Los Angeles for about 4 months. After that, I got a call from Jeff Porcaro and David Paich and they asked me if I would come and Sing with the Band they were putting together called "Toto". I knew that both of them were some of the best Musicians I had ever heard, so I told them I would love to be in their Band. You asked me if this was a Life Changing Decision for my Career, and it definitely was. I enjoyed playing with both of those Bands so much.

**Toto...on the first record "You are the flower", great song in my opinion, and "Takin it back" are the only songs not written by David Paich to be featured on the album. Did the other guys also write some songs that didn't make it on the record?**

Everyone in the Band "Toto" were very good writers. I'm not sure if they had any Songs ready for the First Album though. I wrote that Song: "You Are The Flower", and the Lyrics were about my Daughter. Toto recorded that song the night after I had just written it. Steve Porcaro was the Writer of the song "Takin' It Back". David Paich had written all of the other Songs on the First Album. I loved doing that First Album, and I was with them until the "Toto IV" CD. I started Singing about 4 Songs for the "Isolation CD", but that's about when I left that Band.

**Even though the first record had really good reviews and did pretty well it was only with Toto 4 that the band really achieved the success it deserved. Tell us a little bit more about those years that lead to Toto 4...did the band thought it (the breakthrough album) would never happen?**

Actually, for the 2nd and 3rd CD Toto Recorded, there were some nice Songs on those, however we didn't Sell as many of them, and there were some changes in the Label we were on that couldn't help us very much. After that, when we started the "Toto IV" CD, we realized that we had to do the best Songs we possibly could do. I loved those Songs. I was so excited to be Nominated for 8 Grammy Awards for the Song; "Rosanna". No one had ever been Nominated for 8 Grammy Awards, and no one had ever won over 2 of those Awards. We Won 6 Grammy Awards for that Song though.

**Tell us about your voice...how difficult it is to sing all those high notes in long tours as Toto did back in the days? How do you take care of your voice? Do you exercise a lot?**

Actually, I am having more fun singing these days, because I went to a Vocal Specialist Doctor in Münster Germany, and he put a Vocal Machine into my Vocal Chords, which allowed me to Sing higher notes that I ever have done.

**Besides Toto you played on various records including your solo projects...what's your best studio experience? Or favorite musician/singer you played with?**

I did most of the Background Vocals on Bill Champlin's Album called "Single". Bill was with the Band "Chicago" for 28 years, and we have always been best friends. It was great to work with Bill, and I still do a lot of Concerts with him these days.

**Rise Up, your first solo record, is a pretty straight Aor album...some of the songs on that album ended up on Unruly Child first record...how was collaborating with Bruce Gowdy and Marcie Free?**

Those are some great Musicians, and I liked those Songs a lot. It was so fun to do that CD. Gowdy & Free are fantastic in the Music Business.

All I Ever Needed is really different from Rise Up...all songs are written by you and John Zaika and it's more rock meets rhythm and blues music...and i think this kind of music style suits you more as a performer/musician...do you agree with me or not?

I do agree with you Francesco. John did the Music, and I Wrote the Lyrics and Melody for those Songs. It was totally fun to Record that CD, and I loved those Songs too. There were some very good Musicians playing on that CD.

We're not in Kansas anymore...your new solo record...tell us about this new cd...it has a more contemporary sound in my opinion...

That CD feels like one of the very best Albums that I've ever been on. It was so fun to Write, Record, and do so many things with it. I listen to it several times a day, and it always makes me feel so wonderful. It's starting to Sell so many copies now, and the Record label is going to begin getting the Radio Stations to play the Single soon. I love it.

On your website there's a really cool initiative called Singers corners...why and how you come up with that?

I have always wanted to allow new Vocalists to be heard by many people, and I gave them a chance to do that. If they ever have any need for Vocal Advice, they can always ask me anything they want, and I will do my very best to help them. I just thought it was a good idea to try and help Singers get heard, and get helped if needed.

Is there any chance you will join Toto for the 40th anniversary next year? Maybe sharing the stage with Joseph Williams?

I would like to do that, but I really doubt if they will ask me to do it. There have been many problems amongst some of the Members against me, and I would still love to Sing with them a while with Joseph. Joseph is a good friend of mine, and we've done about 5 CDs together over the years before he was in Toto.

If you did not choose music as a career what would you have liked to do? I know you did 5 years of University studies in the medical field...

I did study PreMed for 5 Years at a University, and I worked as a Lab Tech for that 5 Years too. However, I always still played Concerts about 4 nights a week during that 5 Years too. The 2 DR's who owned the Hospital that I worked in had some problems though. One was Arrested and put in the Penitentiary for 20 years for collecting Money for Car Accidents that did not happen. The other DR. Shot himself not long after that. Then, I just started only doing Concerts after that.

Thanks for your kindness and taking time to do this interview. I saw many Toto shows in my lifetime (approx. 30/35 i think) and some of my fondest memories are the ones with you in Padua (2003) and Verona (1999)...i really miss the old days

I'm very happy that you liked for me to be with Toto when you saw them. I enjoyed Singing with them as well. I'm still having so much fun doing so many Concerts these days, and I would like for you to see me Singing with "The Tom Pfeiffer Band" from Germany. They are one of the best Bands that I've ever Sung a Concert with. I know you would really care about them too..I hope to meet you in Italy, because I always love coming to Italy (One of my favorite places in this World). Thank you for this good interview.

Interview by: Fransesco Licurgo



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