

Howard Jones Biography

Howard Jones' career has always been about the big picture. The singer, songwriter and keyboardist's songs explore universal themes including enlightenment, transcendence, and seeing past one's struggles in order to embrace the wider horizon beyond it. He's sold millions of albums and had 15 top-40 global singles. And while his music often overflows with addictive pop hooks, soaring vocals and creative arrangements, when you dig deeper, you'll find those larger perspectives embedded within.

Jones remains a household name for anyone who grew up in the '80s and '90s. Global hits including "Things Can Only Get Better," "No One is to Blame," "What is Love?" and "New Song" are permanent parts of the pop culture tapestry of the era. Major movies and television shows including *Breaking Bad*, *Bumblebee*, *GLOW*, *Eddie the Eagle*, *Halt and Catch Fire*, and *Everybody Hates Chris* have featured them in recent times. His 1984 debut album *Human's Lib* and the 1985 follow-up *Dream into Action* continue to transcend generations, with 2018 super-deluxe reissues on Cherry Red Records selling out based on pre-orders alone.

"I think the '80s work continues to resonate because it offers little chunks of philosophy to listeners," said Jones. "People have taken the lyrics to heart and they've become part of who they are. It's why I've always got a connection to my fans. There are people who say art can't change the world, but that's not my view. I think music and lyrics can have a profound effect on people. Otherwise, what's the point in doing it?"

Jones is a keyboard and electronica pioneer. From the dawn of his career in the early '80s, he integrated cutting edge analog synths and samplers of the era, including now-classic Roland, Moog, Simmons, and Emulator keyboards. People were so fascinated by Jones' approach that he was asked to take part in the 1985 Grammy Awards, where he performed alongside Stevie Wonder, Herbie Hancock, and Thomas Dolby, affirming his enormous influence on the global music scene.

Perhaps the biggest signifier of Jones' cultural impact at the time was his appearance at the UK Live Aid show at Wembley Stadium in July 1985, during which he played a solo piano version of "Hide and Seek" that was broadcast to 1.9 billion viewers—40 percent of the Earth's population.

Since those halcyon days, Jones' musical approach has dramatically expanded and evolved. In addition to electronic pop output, he's explored the realms of solo piano, string quartets, minimalism, and choral music. Much of that work has been released on his own label Dtox, which he established in 1993 to maximize creative freedom and ensure close contact with his worldwide fan base. Dtox featured many innovations countless artists have since gone on to embrace. Jones was the first musician to make recordings of shows available to artists immediately after the gig. He created personalized piano solos for fans. The packaging of Dtox recordings have also included lavish books and bespoke artwork.

"I'm very grateful for having the launch pad of a major label at the start of my career," said Jones. "I had a name in many territories around the world, which gave me a great head start. But with Dtox I could make any record I wanted to make. I was in charge of every creative element. When you're your own boss, you're responsible for getting into the studio, producing the work, getting on tour, and doing all the things you need to do. It really developed me as a person."

In 2001, Jones received an unexpected call from Ringo Starr who asked him to tour as part of his All-Starr Band that year, together with Sheila E, Roger Hodgson, Ian Hunter, and Greg Lake.

"Playing with Ringo was one of the most amazing experiences of my life," said Jones. "In

addition to playing Beatles classics, I was asked to play keyboards on some Emerson, Lake and Palmer material like 'Karn Evil 9' and 'Lucky Man.' Playing those songs was like paying back a debt of gratitude to Keith Emerson for being such a great inspiration for my keyboard playing."

In the mid-to-late 2000s, Jones released two career highlights: 2005's *Revolution of the Heart* and 2009's *Ordinary Heroes*. The former saw Jones revisiting the buoyant electronic direction of his early work. The latter showcased Jones' songwriting at its most personally revealing, with string and choir arrangements.

He unveiled *Engage*, his most ambitious project to date, in 2015. It was an expansive, interactive experience that crisscrossed myriad disciplines. It's part boundary-breaking album, film, mobile app, book, and live performance. Musically, it brought together the worlds of pop, electronica, contemporary classical, and ambient. *Engage* marked the beginning of a four-part series. The second chapter, *Transform*, is due in 2019. It includes three collaborations with the celebrated American electronica musician and producer BT.

"*Engage* explored the idea that virtual life is okay and a digital link between us will do fine sometimes, but our development as human beings comes from actually being around one another. It's what defines us and pushes us forward. We can't exist on our own in a vacuum. There's no chance for development if we do. *Transform* will discuss the idea that if we want to change the world for the benefit of everyone, first we have to start with ourselves. The third one is *Dialog*, which will be about the fact that we have to talk and thrash things out in order to communicate at the most profound level. The fourth piece is *Global Citizen*. It's about our responsibility toward the planet. We're part of a global group of human beings and I believe each and every one of us has to understand and embrace that."

His influence on newer generations of musicians is substantial. In 2013, French house music artist Cedric Gervais released a new version of "Things Can Only Get Better" featuring Jones on vocals, which spent 14 weeks in the top 40 of the *Billboard* dance charts. Dutch DJ and producer Ferry Corsten released the electronic dance track "Into the Dark" featuring Jones in 2008 to worldwide acclaim. Eric Prydz, the Swiss DJ and producer, remixed "Things Can Only Get Better" and retitled it "And Do You Feel Scared," which appeared on the 2006 *FIFA World Cup* video game.

Jones performs dozens of shows a year worldwide in varied formats. His electric band features keyboardist and programmer Robbie Bronnimann and guitarist Robin Boulton. It delivers hard-hitting, four-to-the-floor versions of material from across his career. He also plays in an acoustic trio with Boulton and bassist Nick Beggs. In addition, Jones does many intimate solo shows in which he tells the stories behind the songs, prior to playing piano-based versions of them.

"The performance formats are different, but they're all related," said Jones. "Music created using software, computers and keyboards is entirely connected to music played solo on piano. Some people criticize electronic music as people pushing buttons and claim there's no emotion. But a piano is also a series of switches and playing it well is about learning how to press the switches in a very precise way. What all the formats have in common is that there's a lot of freedom and flexibility. There are also elements of risk and improvisation. Regardless of the format, I'm always extending pieces, mixing up elements and incorporating audience interaction. The shows are about the creativity that's brought to the instruments being played, not the instruments themselves. My goal is simply to move the audience, no matter what the format is."

Jones' music is significantly influenced by spirituality. He has a wide-open perspective

inclusive of a multitude of worldviews. He believes different faiths and paths are complementary, including his focus as a practicing Buddhist for more than 20 years.

"Buddhism is a central part of my life that influences everything, including how I behave towards other people," said Jones. "Buddhism promotes the idea of absolutely respecting every single person, as well as respecting oneself. When you start from that point of view, it helps create harmonious situations around you, including with my band, managers, and other people involved in what I do, as well as with my audiences."

One constant has remained across Jones' four-decade career: using music as a force for good.

"I want to make a real contribution to people's lives," said Jones. "I believe music is almost unfairly powerful in the sense that you can really get into someone's head with it. It provides an entry into people's consciousness. If you're going to have that power, I feel you should put it to good use. Life is just a crazy thing to be involved in. I feel it's my job to make great music that supports people in some way and helps them get through it."