Styx and Stones

The HIV positive bassist for Styx takes on Top 40 disclosure

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Chuck Panozzo was a ’70s rock god. After years in the closet, the Styx (“Come Sail Away”) bassist eventually came out to the band, but not his fans—until 1999, when he came out publicly as positive and gay. In his tell-all book The Grand Illusion (AMACOM), out this May and titled after the band’s first triple-platinum album, Panozzo, 58, covers Styx’s glory days, his 1991 HIV diagnosis and performing at last summer’s Gay Games in leather. He still tours with Styx and gave *POZ* backstage access.

Why did you write the book?
I used to think the other band members would have to die before I could write it. But it’s about my personal experience. And it gets the word out that HIV is still ruthless.

Why did you disclose publicly?
I got so sick that I couldn’t even read music, and after that, I could give a fuck if people yelled a name at me. I also thought, “If I let some reporter just write all about it when I’m dead, I’m an idiot.” Also, it puts a human being with HIV out there.

How was the ’70s rock scene?
The Age of Aquarius meant free love for everyone except gay people. I felt isolated and remember asking girls who wanted me to sign their breasts if they had any paper. I always had this feeling if I outed myself too soon and we sold one less album that they would blame me.

Is it different now?
It’s better. Now Sony has a gay label. In my time, the only gay label was faggot.

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