

Pioneer Shawn Phillips rocks on

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Shawn Phillips has long been known as a rock pioneer. Now 66 and living in South Africa, the musician is still blazing his own trail with fans around the world following -- albeit not the number of fans you might expect for someone with such a lengthy, critically-acclaimed career.

Phillips, who plays an array of instruments

If you go

including double-necked six- and 12-string guitars and Indian sitar, has recorded more than 20 of his albums and sat in on many recording sessions, including Sunny South Kenington's "Mellow Yellow" in 1967 and Linda Lewis' "Say No More" in 1971. He also hasn't always gotten credited, like for background vocals on The Beatles' "Lovely Rita Meter Maid."

What: Shawn Phillips, with guest Cam Waters

When: Thursday

Where: Whiskey Bones Roadhouse, 3820 Hwy. 63 N., Rochester

Tickets: \$20 in advance, \$25 day of show

"When stuff like that goes down, you don't realize you're making musical history," said Phillips, during a recent phone interview. "It was just a bunch of guys hanging out, getting stoned and making music."

Rather than looking back, though, Phillips, who was honored with a lifetime achievement award by Universal Music in 2002, is still moving ahead.

He played his eclectic mix of music at an almost sold-out show May 4 at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. On Thursday, Phillips will play at Whiskey Bones Roadhouse in Rochester. This tour also brings him to smaller clubs and venues across the United States and into Canada.

And while he doesn't know how much longer he'll continue to tour internationally, he said he'll continue writing music, even if it never makes the Top 40.

Continuing his long refusal to shape his music to fit the popular style in favor of substance, in 2006 Phillips narrated a nine-movement ballet, "Events In The Life of a Prince," that he'd written to be premiered by the Nashville Symphony Orchestra. He's working on a sequel, "Endless Horizons, Ascendancy to the Throne," which he said he hopes to premier next year.

"Classical is the only music that really has any substance to last hundreds of years," Phillips said.

He hasn't abandoned his eclectic style, though.

Phillips switches between a wide breadth of music styles, including folk-rock, jazz, progressive, pop and classical. He's also been praised by critics for his unusual lyrics, haunting melodies, daunting musicianship and ambition.

"The most difficult thing for a composer to do is to write a unique melody line that you have never heard," Phillips said. "For me, that not only applies to the melody line but it also applies to the words."

To remain unique, Phillips draws inspiration from the world.

"My inspiration comes from life, not relationships," he said, noting that right now the biggest inspiration in his life is his 3-year-old son Liam.

He also continues to surround himself with top-notch musicians.

A newly-available video of his performance last year at the Minnesota Zoo features Phillips performing with Paul Buckmaster, the Grammy Award winning musician known for his orchestral collaborations with Elton John, on strings, and pianist Peter Robinson on

keyboards.

"They both played on every CD I have ever made," Phillips said. "Robinson is just the finest pianist I know. Musically, it just beats the bejesus out of anything on the market."