

## Arnel Pineda: Journey's New Vocalist?

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Journey - that San Francisco-based band who gave us the biggest hits of the 80's ("Open Arms", "Don't Stop Believing") - was shopping around for another new singer. Reports have it that they've asked local frontman Arnel Pineda of Zoo Band to join them after seeing videos of him performing note-for-note Journey covers on YouTube. Sounds like a movie plot! Is this life imitating art?

If you survived the 80's, you probably remember that power-ballad driven band Journey. With musicians like vocalist Steve Perry (of "Foolish Heart" fame), guitarist Neal Schon, keyboardist Jonathan Cain, bassist Ross Valory and drummer Steve Smith (who went to become a famed jazz drummer in his own right), the band unleashed one power ballad and anthem after another and drummed these into our consciousness.

Songs like "Don't Stop Believing", "Any Way You Want It", "Faithfully", "Open Arms", "Separate Ways" - pepper many a golden oldies mix CD, or a beer garden's jukebox repertoire.

The band recently re-entered pop-culture consciousness when its old hit "Don't Stop Believing" was selected to end the Sopranos' final episode.

The band never fully recovered from the departure of popular vocalist Steve Perry (who left twice, in 1987 and after a brief reunion, in 1996) and the band has gone through two other vocalists since then, the last being Jeff Scott Soto, who left the band in June 2007.

And now word has come our way that a Filipino cover band singer by the name of Arnel Pineda of the Zoo Band, was personally invited by Journey to audition for the band in San Francisco.

And here's the rub. Pineda got the attention of the band because of his numerous video performances on the popular video-sharing site YouTube, where he was seen performing Journey covers, and nailing the notes that made Steve Perry famous.

Is it an example of life imitating art imitating life? Undoubtedly so, if you remember the B-movie Rockstar (starring Mark Wahlberg and Jennifer Anniston) which in turn was based on the story of Judas Priest vocalist Ripper Owens. In the film, the fictional hair metal band Steel Dragon plucks a cover band singer out of obscurity and asks him to front their band. And so it goes for our boy Arnel.

Reports have it that Arnel is already in the US auditioning for the band, accompanied by the Zoo's manager, TV director Bert de Leon.

But the fly in the ointment is that some hardcore Journey fans are not all happy campers when it comes to that decision. Message threads on Arnel on the MelodicRock.com and Journeyforums.com have the guy being flogged with racist taunts and putdowns of the Filipino accent he allegedly uses while performing Journey covers.

"Journey is supposed to be an all-American band," writes one fan. Others liken the band's move to outsourcing the job to cheaper Asian labor.

Geez, can't a guy just sing "Open Arms" in peace anymore?

Will Arnel get the gig, or will the racist Journey fans have their say? We're staying tuned for more developments in this story.

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Video: Arnel Pineda performing the Journey golden oldie "Faithfully" at the Hard Rock Cafe, Makati with the Zoo Band. One of many videos of Pineda posted on YouTube that got Journey's attention.