

Overheard On a Park Bench

SIDE A

A SMALL TOWN NEAR PORTLAND

There was a fantastic jazz/world fusion band in the 80s called “Oregon,” that featured guitarist Ralph Towner and jazz oboist Paul McCandless. This band had a huge influence on me as a young musician, and its sound has stayed with me all these years.

This tune is a piano duet (duel?) Jeff is on the left, and I am on the right. Make sure you have your headphones on correctly ... Ah what the hell – put ’em on backwards. It won’t matter – he’s better than I am anyway.

STREETS AND RHODES

I’ve always loved the joyous energy of a brisk jazz waltz, and here’s my take on the form. This is my chance to have some fun on the Rhodes, with beautiful commentary and a fine solo by Kevin on his flugelhorn. The long-tone background lines that Kevin plays are a reminiscent of the great Gerry Mulligan.

NEWTOWN FUNK

Everybody’s rockin’ on this tune – Jeff, Vern and Pat give it their all on their solos. Even I get into the action on the Rhodes.

RAGS TO RICHES

This song is a nod to Ragtime, an early influence in the history of jazz, and to Oscar Peterson’s “Hymn to Freedom,” surely one of the great riches in Canadian jazz music.

I’m on piano. Vern provides ‘commentary and clarification’ on clarinet with one of the most soulful obligato performances I’ve ever heard. I am still moved to tears by his playing on this song.

SIDE B

OVERHEARD ON A PARK BENCH

Sometimes people ask me if I see pictures when I compose. Usually the answer is no, but this tune is different. Imagine a couple of old duffers sitting on a park bench in Central Park or Washington Square. They are relaxed, and their interaction reflects the gentle pace of their lives while all around them the city bustles. People comment on the pair as they walk by (that’s Kevin on his flugelhorn).

My piano solo is an *homage* to one of my favourite jazz pianists, Ahmad Jamal.

IN AN ENGLISH GARDEN

Strange title, I know, and anyone who gets the reference gets free lunch. Hint – it’s a Beatles tune.* A rare chance for the electric piano to shine. Pat plays a beautiful solo on fretless bass near the end. (*the answer is below)

NuGrv

That’s “New Groove” for all you over-30s. Not exactly what I’m known for, but I love this kind of music and had a blast writing and playing on it. My good friend, mentor and great composer in his own right, Doug Wilde, sits in on piano and provides some wonderful counterpoint to my Rhodes.

WHEREVER I WAS, HERE I AM

This tune was originally composed in the late 70s, but contains many of the same musical elements that I still love to explore, and which I have done on this record. The title contains several references; to Jon Kabat-Zinn’s well known Buddhist writings, to the ‘little people’ within us who have been there since childhood, and to how amazed I am at my own journey and the unlikely path which has led me to where I am today.

Vern Dorge (clarinet, sax) has been at the top of the list of jazz woodwind players in Toronto for decades. He has worked with everyone in this town, and toured with Blood Sweat and Tears in the 80s. Vern played lead alto sax and clarinet on the video game CUPHEAD, a project that is an ongoing part of my professional life.

Kevin Turcotte (flugelhorn) is another stalwart on the Toronto jazz scene, and in 2014 he provided the trumpet tracks for the Chet Baker biopic *Born To Be Blue*. His soulful playing was perfect for this project.

Margaret Maria (cello) is a fellow screen composer and symphonic cellist, most recently with the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa. Her improvisational skills are formidable and her atmospheric musings added a wonderful textural layer to the two tunes on which she’s heard, “A Small Town Near Portland” and “In An English Garden.”

Jeff McLeod (piano) is a fine and versatile jazz pianist, with an aggressive style which fit my vision for this record perfectly. We share an alma mater in the Eastman School of Music in Rochester NY. Jeff is the pianist in the CUPHEAD orchestra.

Doug Wilde (piano) has been a friend and mentor since meeting at the Eastman School of Music in 1979, and he helped me record my first commercial demo reel some 35 years ago. He’s currently music director of the fusion band Manteca, and a dynamite piano player.

Eric St. Laurent (guitar) is a highly skilled guitarist, and this is my first time working with him. I was attracted to his unique and occasionally unorthodox playing style, which is on full display in “NuGrv.”

Pat Kilbride (bass) played on “Hockey Night in Canada” for me in 2014, which is when I first met and worked with him. Pat is a killer bassist, with exceptional musicianship.

Davide Drenzo (drums) played on HNIC as well, and is one of the most inventive and colourful drummers I know of. It was inspiring for me to have both Pat and Davide in their respective chairs on this project.

Mark Kelso (drums) is one of the most sought after drummers in town. He has played with just about everyone, and currently chairs the drum department at Humber College. I am especially appreciative of his persistence in getting “Overheard On a Park Bench” to work conceptually.

Arturo Avalos (percussion) is also a member of Manteca and a good friend. We are cottage neighbours on beautiful Lake Catchacoma and have been known to klink a few Coronas on the dock at magic hour. It’s a treat to hear him on this album.

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Heartfelt thanks to my lovely Katina, not only for urging me to complete this project, but more importantly for encouraging me to rediscover my own musical voice. Also for her incredible ears and thoughtful feedback along the way.

Thanks also to my good pal David Bradstreet for pushing me to keep on being a creating musician, to Ron Jones for his inspiration and encouragement, and to my childhood friend Gerald Edwards for agreeing not to sing on this record. And to Nick V. for his beautiful art.

Thanks to Nick Vitacco, Eric Cadesky, Doug Wilde and Matt Couto for their invaluable and generously offered feedback throughout the process of creating these recordings.

And thanks to Jeremy Darby for being just about the best darned engineer we’ve got and such great fun to work with. Now if only he could make a decent cup of tea ...

I dedicate this album to my sons, Nico and Matt. This project is proof that it is never too late to follow your heart, wherever it leads. May you always have the opportunity and courage to do so.

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