

HANK SHIZZOE: BREATHER ABOUT THE SONGS

TWO WAYS OF RUNNING

I got the idea for the lyrics from a Sufi poem by Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi. The poem tells the story of a jealous wife and her husband. It is very graphic. I liked the simple sentences at its core. The main riff was written on my fourstring Kay banjo during the rehearsals for the open air play "Of Mice And Men" in summer 2008. There was a moment in the play where I had to wait behind a huge billboard. Nobody on stage or in the audience could hear me picking away. Night after night I would pick up the initial hook and start developing the tune. The music has a definitive Mali vibe to it and the rhythm loops seem to go well with that. There is also enough space for some cheesy reggae organ bits. The lead guitar part was played on an ancient Supro Ozark guitar that sports the same pickup a certain slide guru from Santa Monica uses on his guitar. It is a beautiful, haunting sound.

SVALUTATION

A song made famous by the great Adriano Celentano in 1976. I remember hearing it on the radio in our family car. The twangy guitar had me spellbound. More than 30 years later I am still very fond of this song. I looked around for cover versions and found a bunch but not a single one of them really rocking. So I figured this would be a good time to give it some rough edges. Funnily enough the lyrics about economic crisis, media hoopla and the failure of politics could have been written last week. Christoph Beck played a fantastic drum part. I didn't even try to duplicate the Dave Edmunds style solo in the coda and instead let rip on the lap steel. The wah pedal adds to the overall crazyness. My first attempt at singing in Italian.

WHEN A GUY GETS BOOBS

Speaking of crazyness... Of course I adore David Lindley's playing. He is also a great songwriter. I played this song of his during my solo tours in 2008 and 2009 because I love the lyrics and the John Lee Hooker boogie riff does well with the loop machine. Some years ago I played a handful of shows with Mr. Dave, including a slide guitar workshop with him and Sonny Landreth. I asked for David's permission to record this song and he was so nice about it. The initial plan was for him to record a Saz part for this version. That didn't work out, so I dusted off the Supro once more. The basic track was just me on fuzz guitar and Christoph Beck on drums. All the other noise got piled up later.

SHAKER

One of those songs that materialises out of the blue and finds its way onto the fretboard. I was noodling around on my acoustic Martin, experimenting with different folkie tunings and suddenly this tune appeared. This time I was smart enough to immediately record it. The lyrics wrote themselves. I am really glad I asked Shirley Grimes to sing harmony with me. The rhythm part is me on Cajon and Shakers. Also I had to look through my attic to find the old Peavey fretless bass. The antique strings fit the arrangement perfectly.

RECESSION BLUES

Late fall of 2008 brought the economic crisis. The media jumped on the issue as if there was no tomorrow. You'd have thought that it was a question of mere weeks until the world as we know it would collapse and everything would burn down to the ground. There were a lot of case studies of people who combined greed and stupidity to follow the Madoffs of this world into oblivion. At the same time other people made shitloads of money. I was reading a biography of Franklin Delano Roosevelt at that time and couldn't help but notice that obviously the economic world has not really learned anything in the last 100 years. This song is sung from the perspective of someone who has to leave the country in a bit of a hurry. Michel Pof-fet added his upright bass to the folk rock arrangement.

SAFE NEW WORLD

Facebook, youtube, twitter and all that. I am not a friend of those who condemn all new media just because they are new. I am using these platforms myself. But if you hear from individuals that they spend half their time feeding huge external disk drives or their entire fortunes in a two dimensional Second Life it makes you wonder whether these new media are a smart idea. Add to that the booming business of the

videogames and you step into the realm of weirdness. It amazes me that millions of people buy plastic karaoke devices and mime their way through Beatles and Metallica songs. We applied a lot of fuzzy guitars here and Christoph Beck hit the drums as hard as he could. With real drumsticks made of wood. Oli Boesch even rescued the old analog Space Echo from storage for the mixdown.

NOT IN VAIN

I have been a fan of good blues lyrics all my life. Sometimes when the radio is on I shout back at some dickhead who keeps singing that some woman or girl eventually will forget everything she holds dear and love him in the end. Probably all night long. The world is full of songs with promises no one can keep. So I thought it was time for a little honesty here. Again Michel Poffet played his snarling upright bass. I think it blends well with the Silvertone slide guitar.

ONLY IN AMERICA

When Michael Jackson died all the TV stations were glad that something pulled them out of their late summer lethargy. Anchormen interviewed correspondents in the streets of Los Angeles, asking them how "the mood of the people in the streets" was. Most of the coverage was what is now called "no content." Swiss national TV's "breaking news" of the Jackson funeral was a particularly embarrassing affair. Live pictures of a golden casket in an arena interweaved with performances of casting show contestants and all this nonsense about the title "King of Pop." Really sad. Around that time former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin stepped down as governor of Alaska. Her press conference was a dadaistic performance. The woman was completely out of what was left of her mind. I was thinking that it was saddening to witness what this once great nation has come to be. The rhythm track is me on doubled cajon parts and brushes. The steel guitar in the background is an old Gibson tuned to C6th.

I STILL WANT YOU

Just recently there was an interview with Bob Dylan in which he said that the only thing he liked about rap was "rhyming for rhyming's sake." That's the point here, together with a classic Telecaster riff and some very tight and dry drumming by Christoph Beck. This kind of tune also fits my limited ability as an organ player. The slide guitar part in the coda was played on the first electric guitar I ever bought, a Stratocaster made from Rockinger parts.

SPLIT THE LOOT

Probably the first song recorded for this album. I just love western swing steel guitar and any tune that's playable on steel is a good tune in my book.

ET MOI, ET MOI, ET MOI

I must have heard this song on the radio in the late sixties or early seventies. Jacques Dutronc's deadpan delivery of these great lyrics over a European style Bo Diddley beat has fascinated me ever since. It's a very clever and snotty tune and has something punkish about it. I played this song during my solo tours because the arrangement worked well with the loop machine. When it was time to record it in the studio I thought some bouzouki and piano bass could help.

ONE CUP OF COFFEE AND A CIGARETTE

This one has a Dylan connection. I was downloading selected episodes of his fabulous "Theme Time Radio Hour". The one about coffee was particularly good. There is something eternal about the combination of nicotine and caffeine, especially in a time when health obsession becomes the new religion. This song was written by the rather obscure rockabilly artist Jerry Irby, mostly known for his song "Driving Nails In My Coffin." I liked the lyrics and the beat and heard it with a cartoon soundtrack organ playing the main riff. The vocals were recorded through a Telefunken DA-9 microphone I found on eBay. My nephew played the tambourine part. He was very excited about that.

**The album BREATHER is available on CD and vinyl
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