

Imagining America

You could consider this CD to be a continuation of the exploration of America started with "Angels of the Mission Trail" (Doug McArthur & Jeffra tv 1111). On that CD we sang about the history and reality of California.

I had not done a solo CD for many years and decided to record this one with just my old guitar. I still perform with Jeffra whenever I can.

My own experience imagining the US includes growing up in a tourist town on Lake Huron where we saw Americans as cash cows with skis strapped to their car roofs in July. Then tentative journeys to Ann Arbor and Detroit, tours in the early eighties with Stan Rogers, cross country many times in the early nineties with Garnet, solo tours to New England and finally a straight five years in San Francisco partnering with Jeffra on a number of historical music projects. I returned to Canada and started a web design business only to have my first big client waft me down to Texas. Now I know them better. And I like them more.

Their history is now my history. In this spirit I imagine America:

A word here about my 1976 Larrivée guitar. It has survived a complete car wreck, a house burning down around it, a breakin at my Winnipeg apartment, miles of miles and motels. Rob got the sound of it here for sure. Hope you get to hear it Jean. Thanks to Chopper for the deal.

Thanks also to Peter Bosehart (sail on, buddy), Eric Collins, Walter & Brenda, Annie & Carl, Jeffra.

"Democracy is coming to the USA" - Leonard Cohen

All words and music by Doug McArthur except for tune of Red River Valley used in Lone Star.

All songs published by Skye Songs SOCAN.

Witness

I stood at New York's Ground Zero with these words ringing in my head.

I was born while the ash of Nagasaki
Sifted down like dust upon the shelf
I was watching while the skyline of Manhattan
Folded in upon itself
Ordinary people
In their ordinary lives
Torn apart like broken butterflies
Taken by surprise
Heaven help me I am a witness

Bless my hungry ears and eyes.

Like some dangerous moon I watch the planet
Roll beneath me as it rides
Those I love and those who love me
Are drawn toward me like the tides
Extraordinary people
In extraordinary times
Break the rules and step into the light
Shattered in my sight
Heaven help me I am a witness
Bless my lonely satellite.

Boots & Saddles

*On tour in Pennsylvania, after several days living in Clank, the old GMC van,
Stan and the boys dropped into an isolated roadhouse. The waitress came over
to talk. We were not the first sailors on these shores.*

Boots and Saddles on the Penn State Line
In a dusty roadhouse in 1949
Its Betty's first day working and the day is going slow
She's very pretty and Joe's her first date
Up come a station wagon from out of state
And out from the back steps Bill Monroe
The Bluegrass Boys are quite a sight
Hours from home they've been driving all night
Only time for a pit stop and coffee to go

Bill pours his coffee and he's O so polite
Yes they're playing on the Opry tonight
Maybe she might like to go?
She spills the coffee but she don't feel the burn
In just that moment her whole world turns
Then up from the pumps comes good old greasemonkey Joe
She loves the fiddle and the mandolin
Nashville's a town - she's never been
It breaks her heart that she can't go.

*Boots & Saddles and they're gone
Ride the great highways 'till dawn
Sometimes for the money Sometimes for the song
Boots & Saddles and they're gone.*

Its eight years later and they're married now
She does the job but she don't know how

Up on the tarmac comes a long black limousine
A flash of jewelry and a body guard
Joe's at the window and he's starin' hard
He says "My God Betty I believe it is the King!"
She brings the coffee to the limo door
A flash of dark eyes and so much more
The most beautiful smile she's ever seen.

(Boots & Saddles)

Its late at night and the lights are low
There ain't no Betty there ain't no Joe
There's just me and my flattop playin' in the night
But every morning in the motels of the land
Another cup of coffee starts another country band
They'll be out on the road another workin' night
I love the fiddle and the mandolin
Nashville's a town I've never been
And it breaks my heart that I can't go

(Boots & Saddles)

Cottontop

I didn't mind my hair turning gray when I turned fifty but I was surprised to find myself invisible on the streets of Haight-Ashbury.

Natty Dread down on Stanyon Street
Head full of Ecstasy
There was a time my friend
That might have been me

He can't see me so I step side
Cottontop is invisible
Just a step on a long slow slide
Eternity indivisible.

*O To Be Young Again
In San Francisco*

Pretty young Caribbean girl
with her eyes of Lapis Lazuli
Skin so deep if you blew on it
Man, it' would ruffle

I'm invisible now, more or less
Cottontop don't leave no mark

A world of trouble in a cheap print dress
A world of wolf whistles in the dark.

*O To Be Young Again
In San Francisco*

*I turned fifty and I turned grey
I must have started to fade away
Young people they just pass me by
They don't know who and they don't care why
But I'm still here
I'm not done
I don't believe I'm the only one*

Old Hippy staggers from the Golden Gate
Lost in the shadows of the junky park
Still lookin' for love on a street called Haight
Lookin' for the high water mark

I know he sees me but he'll never stop
Cottontop just ain't his style
White Rabbit can't stop to talk
Alice has it all on file

*O To Be Young Again
In San Francisco*

The Dust of Davy Crockett

Surreal layered history and a pretty good computer joke. Computer jokes are hard to write.

I was driving hard through Texas and the sun was going down
The dust of Davy Crockett was blowing all around
I was thinking of Colonel Travis he had heroes to anoint
I was thinking about Jim Bowie, now that man had a point
*And the wind comes up as the sun goes down
And the Dust of Davy Crockett is blowing all around.*

I was at a desert truckstop and I saw Geronimo
He was living in the parking lot - he had no place to go
I said "Where are all your warriors and where's your Cadillac?"
He jumped into a Lexus with three Spice Girls in the back
*And the wind comes up as the sun goes down
And the Dust of Davy Crockett is blowing all around.*

I was out of luck in Luchenbach I was pausing for the cause

Down the road came Willie Nelson and a bunch of bad outlaws
I said "Willie can you tell me why it is I never see
Guy Clark and David Olney, Townes Van Zandt on my TV?"
*And the wind comes up as the sun goes down
And the Dust of Davy Crockett is blowing all around.*

I was driving South from Houston with a truckload of bad code
I was almost 'cross the border, Federales checked my load
They said "Doug , you know you're overweight and painfully out of touch?"
I said" The Ones they might weigh something, but the Zeroes can't weigh
much"
*And the wind comes up as the sun goes down
And the Dust of Davy Crockett is blowing all around.*

Well now you've heard my story and I hope it made you grin
"Cause the great state of Texas is a real state to be in
It's big and wild and beautiful and everybody knows
If it was half as big again it would be Ontario!
*And the wind comes up as the sun goes down
And the Dust of Davy Crockett is blowing all around.*

Silverado

The lovely Napa valley holds more than one treasure and so many stories.

The mine it had been salted and the only well went bad
Soaked up all our labour and every cent we had
Anastasia stood there watching as I knelt upon the ground
She was staring 'cross the plains to Silverado

*Silverado
Is it nothing but a dream?
Silverado
Is nothing what it seems?*

Those who come to Silverado almost always come by sea
'round the Horn to San Francisco and up the broad valley
Across the Joaquin delta and the rough American
Find their way to St. Helena - Silverado

*Silverado
Is it nothing but a dream?
Silverado
Is nothing what it seems?*

So why we started walking was never clear to me
She said we'll work with what we have - what we had was poverty

Across the High Sierra down the snow choked Western side
There was nothing in her mind but Silverado

Silverado
Is it nothing but a dream?
Silverado
Is nothing what it seems?

When we got to Calistoga it was plain to see
The mine was choked and strangled by the big machinery
"Too late - too late " I panicked - Anastasia's gaze was down
Through her fingers ran the soil of Silverado

Silverado
Is it nothing but a dream?
Silverado
Is nothing what it seems?

Anastasia's still a beauty though I have grown old
We never found the silver but we found a kind of gold
A mile of twisted grapevine and a river of red wine
We worked with what we had in Silverado

Silverado
Is it nothing but a dream?
Silverado
Is nothing what it seems?

Louisiana Angel

Written on a ragged drive 'cross Texas on my way to California. Of course the Dark Angel would be a beautiful hitchhiker on US 20. The recurring line comes from Rumi.

Fever in the Bayou
Fever on the killing floor
Fever in the kudzu
From here to Arkansas
Its noon in Dealey Plaza
The limos turn down main
Whoever brought you here will have to get you home again

The Angel came from Louisiana
In the back of my flatbed Ford
The smoky eyes of a preacher man
Hot-wired to the Lord
He said "God so loves this country

He's gonna burn it to the bone"
Whoever brought you here will have to get you home

Driven' out of Shreveport
In the middle of the night
Louisiana Angel
Caught in my headlight
Mean old Dallas
Toughest town I know
Whoever brought you here will have to get you home

*O the wings unfold
O this terrible sight
The story's told
There's nothing I can do to change the world tonight*

In a fly-paper barroom
Back by a burnt-out fan
Louisiana Angel
Dancin' to the band
Driftin' slowly
Shiva with a blue dress on
Whoever brought you here will have to get you home

Lone Star

An unlikely series of events brought me to the world's largest chemical plant south of Houston. The image vs. the reality in East Texas.

Spring it comes so easy in the Hill Country
Barbecue and blossoms beneath the pecan tree
The lovers who have partners are up in Barton Spring
Rolling in the long grass whispering secret things
The boys down at Greune Hall are warming up the band
You can hear the coolers popping you can hear the screen door slam
And the lovers without partners are holding up the bar
Up behind the water tank you can see an evening star

*Lone Star
Keep Shining
Lone Star
Shine on me*

There's no more cane on the Brazos just a big Dow Chemical town
The Yellow Rose of Texas is a faded rusty brown
At the field of San Jacinto the big refineries glow
Its hard to see a single star at the flood-lit Alamo

Remember?

*Lone Star
Keep Shining
Lone Star
Shine on me*

I'm following the Lone Star with a pistol in my hand
I'm pulling on cowboy boots for reasons I don't understand
The shade of old Sam Houston is sadly looking down
And the dust of Davy Crockett is blowing all around

*Lone Star
Keep Shining
Lone Star
Shine on me*

Comanche Moon

European entrepreneurs sold German families on the free land, milk and honey of the high Texas plains. The Comanche may have been the most effective military force ever seen in North America.

Glittering conquistadors from Toledo and Castille
Swords still dripping from the goldmines of Peru
Who burned their boats and turned their backs on Spain
Who drove the sword and Cross like a fist into the face of the continent
Shivered, unbelieving, beneath their first Comanche Moon

Buckskin hunters from Boonesboro and Cumberland
Three generations out from the arctic Scottish coast
Who left their land on the Blue ridge and turned their backs on Boston
Who fought like bears on the Natchez Trace
Shivered, unbelieving, beneath their first Comanche Moon

The Lipan Apache, lords of the high plains
Dangerous dancers from the far off purple mountains
Who left the land a desert and turned their backs on no one
Who thrived on rocks and cactus
Shivered, unbelieving, beneath their first Comanche Moon

Come with me to the Red river Valley
Let us leave the blue Danube behind
We will live in a high windy cabin
Far above the Balcones Line

Who the Woz Was

It's been a wild ride in Silicon Valley. All those idea guys that wanted to change the world in the '60's did it in the '90's. How? Maybe the Homebrew club, Captain Crunch whistles and a genial genius named Wozniak. Oh, and the Cavity Magnetron. For sure.

In '76 I was still young and pretty,
Rainbow jacket and Gypsy ways,
Livin' right here in Silicon Valley
Back then we called it San Jose,
Fields and orchards, blossoms on the air,
Now it's freeways buildings everywhere,
That was now
This is then
*I didn't even know who the Woz was then
(Didn't even know who the Woz was then)*

David Packard and Nolan Bushnell,
Bill Gates and that whole bunch,
Doug Engelbart and the boys at Xerox,
Homebrew and Captain Crunch,
Steve Wozniak and Steven Jobs,
Every house needs a two genius garage,
That was now,
This is then,
*I didn't even know who the Woz was then
(Didn't even know who the Woz was then)*

*I thought I could change the world
I did not understand,
The only way to change the world
Is to give the world a hand,*

So gather 'round all you gray haired hippies,
Turn your hearing aids and powerbooks on,
You're wrong if you think the dream is over,
Wrong if you think the dream is gone,
Get connected, get on-line,
Get excited one more time,
That was now,
This is then,

*I didn't even know who the Woz was then
(Didn't even know who the Woz was then)
I didn't even know who the Woz was then
(Didn't even know who the Woz was then)*

Justice

This song was included on the "Tears of a Thousand Years" CD featuring Canadian artists reacting to the Sept. 11th attack.

Something in the wind tonight
Something in the air
Something that is still not right
Something still not there
There's Sorrow here
There'll be Sorrow here again
But I believe there's Justice in the wind.

I'm sleeping in a big hotel
All expenses paid
Below me on the Snow Bound street
There's a family on a hot air grate
There's Madness here
There'll be Madness here again
But I believe there's Justice in the wind.

Justice rose on her Blood Red Wings she chooses who she will please
If you're born in North America, you've already won the lotteries
Justice gave me this whiskey voice and talent just enough to tease
She said "If you serve me well you'll never have gold
But you'll have lots of friends and you'll never grow old
I'll shake your speakers I'll rattle your roof
And it'll only work if you speak the Truth."

So I'm sharpening my rusty tools
I'll keep my powder dry
I'll be ready when they change the rules
I'll be the first to fly
There's Danger here
There'll be Danger here again
But I believe there's Justice in the wind.