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2009-2010 Adventures In Audio

WELCOME! THESE ARE THE EXCITING ADVENTURES OF YOUR HUMBLE CORRESPONDENT AS HE MAKES A NAME FOR HIMSELF IN THE WORLD OF AUDIO. FOR PRIVACY REASONS, SOME NAMES MAY BE BLANKED OUT.

Monday, February 9, 2009

ANNUAL GRAMMY RANT

This will be easy—I didn't watch the Grammys. Frankly, I was too busy and I wasn't all that interested anyway. I did read that Robert Plant and Allison Kraus got a "whole lotta love," winning five of 'em. I am a member of NARAS, the people who do the Grammys, but I think there is something seriously wrong with an organization that nominates Lil Wayne for best lyricist. Just do a Google search for Lil Wayne lyrics. My three year-old daughter puts together more intelligent thoughts than he does.

Sadly, this seems to be the way the "big time" music business is going. That's why I am content doing the indie thing. Indie is the wave of the future. Independent artists are where real music will be made. The major labels are into throw-away, consumerism music. The smaller labels are dedicated to the art, where the majors are dedicated to the almighty dollar. There's nothing wrong with earning lots of money, but the majors just, well, prostitute themselves, pandering to the lowest common denominator—they have no art.

I did an album review a while back on Wes Cunningham. This morning, I got an email from him, updating me on what's going on with him. He also sent me a song he just recorded, which is head and shoulders over anything that was on the Grammys last night. Folks like Wes need to be encouraged. Instead of giving Lil Wayne your hard-earned money for a CD, take the same money and go out this weekend to a local music venue and enjoy some live music. You can say hi to the singer between sets. You think you could do that with Lil Wayne? He wouldn't even give you the time of day. Buy local!

In conclusion, on this day forty-five years ago, the Beatles were introduced to America on the Ed Sullivan Show. The rest is history.

Monday, March 2, 2009

MARCH MADNESS

I've been out of Bates Technical College for a year now, and it's been quite a year. Prior to finishing at Bates, I took a temp position at Safeco Field. That's lasted longer than anyone thought it would (I'm still doing it), but it may very well wind down before baseball season starts. Hey, I'll keep showing up until they say don't come back. I'm very appreciative of that.

I was also in a minor car accident today. Nobody hurt, but it didn't do much for my mood.

I may be starting a collaboration of sorts this month. More to come. (I like leaving teasers like that. It gets you to come back to the site later on. I'm devious like that.)

Last week, I attended an AES meeting in Seattle, and the topic was intellectual property and copyrights. At South Sound Audio, we are very respectful of others' intellectual property. I have never, nor will I ever, release copyright material without going through the proper channels. The stuff on the Audio page are fair use, and permission is secured in all cases, otherwise it wouldn't be there. This is the main reason Twilight Records only releases archival material. If I was to release someone else's album on Twilight, and he or she did a cover song that hasn't been properly cleared, I don't want to be responsible.

A lot of in-studio work happening this month. Some older stuff is being revisited with newer technology for a different sound. Also, I may be involved in a stage production happening in the next few months.

I don't get political on the "blog." But I need to comment on the current economic situation without giving praise or blame to anyone— hang tight. It's gonna be a bumpy ride, but we're going to get through it fine. South Sound Audio is not immune to certain economic downturns. All the stuff is 100% paid for, so South Sound Audio will ride this out. When there's less money going around, people aren't likely to patronize a band, who in turn is going to patronize me, so there has been a sudden downturn of work. There are still plenty of projects to be working on, and people are still using my services, so it's still good, but it could be better. Business is still growing, but not at the rate I'd like. Things will work out fine for everyone.

Saturday, March 28, 2009

UNCONVENTIONAL CONVENTIONEERS

The Rocky Horror Band has been going full tilt for three weeks now, and today was our first rehearsal with the cast at the theater. It was nothing short of great. Everything the band did meshed very well, and it was the cast that had problems with lyrics, etc. I'm only saying this to show how far we as a band have come in such a short time.

I've got to say that the full band hasn't rehearsed together yet. For example, it's been me and Gary, the guitarist, and John, the musical director, as the only constants. Then Nate, the keyboard player showed up, and now Dave, the drummer. At rehearsal today, we had Dave, but no Nate. Someday before the opening night we hope to have the full band in the same place at the same time. Our band is very professional— all of us are seasoned musicians (even young Nate), and all of us read music, so it makes what we have to do a lot easier.

When asked what projects I'm working on, and I bring up that I am working on *The Rocky Horror Show*, I invariably get the deer-in-the-headlights look, because I am probably the last person some people would think of being

involved with *The Rocky Horror Show*. I look at it from a purely musical viewpoint— there are some great rock ‘n’ roll songs in there. I’ve done my share of “The Time Warp” at the midnight movie when I was in Monterey, California, years ago. But I can honestly say— I never dressed up! If I ever got confronted, I’d tell them I was going as Brad. For those of you that know me, that’s not too far of a stretch! The show is a great time, it’s giving me back some live performance chops, and it’s great networking for other projects that South Sound Audio will be involved in.

Monday, April 6, 2009

PNW STUDIO SUMMIT REPORT AND OTHER ARISING

The annual Studio Summit was held at the Experience Music Project in Seattle on April 4th, and was pretty well attended. I saw a lot of my AES colleagues there. The Summit started with a panel discussion of some studio owners and various others in the music industry on studio survival. Trends in the music industry, as well as the economy, are taking a toll on studios. Studios need to work outside the box in order to survive. The trend is for smaller, more mobile, studios. (Kinda sounds like South Sound Audio.)

The keynote interviews were great, as usual. First up was Johnny K, who was just nominated for a Grammy. But clearly the star of the show was Roy Thomas Baker, who needs no introduction. It was a great experience to sit ten feet away from him, listening to “Bohemian Rhapsody,” as well as other songs, watching him as they were playing, then hearing him comment on them. He told a lot of stories of how his greatest hits were made. For example, when Freddie Mercury first played “Bohemian Rhapsody” on piano for him, then remarked, “And this is where the opera comes in.” Roy Thomas Baker is also responsible for the “New Wave” sound with The Cars albums. He was very engaging, funny, and a really great guy.

We’re getting ready for *The Rocky Horror Show*, three weeks from this Friday! Time flies. This is my priority project right now. Rockin’ Chair Money has two projects— a CD and a DVD— that I am involved with. The DVD soundtrack should prove challenging. It’s a different line-up from the past two RCM albums I’ve done with them. They’ve morphed from a three-piece acoustic band into a five-piece band. There will also be a lot of original material on the new album.

No entry would be complete without a rant, so here’s the latest thing on my mind. I have seen it more and more that there is always a rush to get the product out there, often to the detriment of the product. For example, I did some sessions for a band, made a rough mix for their review, and they released the rough mix! I didn’t want my name on it, and as far as I know, I didn’t get credit for it. In the digital age, it’s possible to do a lot of albums in a short amount of time, and I think quality suffers for it, not necessarily in the audio, but in the final project. I’ve seen albums that I’ve worked on rushed out with glaring typos in the artwork. There was even one where the tracking order didn’t match the track listing on the CD artwork. I don’t think my name even got on that one, and for some reason, I don’t mind. Usually, I do the mixing and audio stuff then I turn the finished product over to the band or label for release. I have no control over the artwork or anything. All of that is just wanting to rush the product out. But you can rest assured that if you ever buy anything from Twilight Records, it’s something I am proud to have my name on, and you can rest assured that it is the best it can be. That is why *Live at Eastern* was so long in the planning stages. But I will continually urge bands not to rush out new releases before all the little things are taken care of. Just doing my part... I’m just sayin’...

Sunday, May 31, 2009

A ROCKY HORROR RETROSPECTIVE

People who know me reacted in pretty much the same way when I told them I was going to be in the house band for Encore! Theater's production of *The Rocky Horror Show*. Granted, it is a little out of character for me. So why did I do it? I've always liked the music. I've always wanted to work a theatrical production to broaden my experience. It's a fantastic networking experience. It's a challenging experience. I wanted to get my "chops" back. It's fun.

Since March, I put pretty much everything music and audio related on the back burner to immerse myself in learning and performing the music. I was lucky to be surrounded by great and very competent musicians. We gelled together very well, and I can honestly say that the last performance of Rocky Horror last night was our best. We pulled out all the stops, we were very focused, and we blew the roof off the place. Even in musicals, the band is an afterthought. I had no pretensions of what the audience was there to see— Brad, Janet, Frank, Riff-Raff, Magenta, Columbia, Eddie, Dr Scott, etc. The band was in a supporting role, even if the story is musically driven.

The five of us in the band— Gary, Bryn, Nate, Dave, and myself— enjoyed playing with each other. Before each show, as the audience was getting settled, we would play some classic rock numbers to pump the crowd. Other times, we would just jam, and it was the jams I liked best. It showed that we could create some wonderful music on our own.

We also got to know and become friends with some of the best local actors around. I look forward to seeing them in other productions, and possibly even working with them, in the future. There was a mutual respect between the band and the actors. Special thanks to the "Blue Mousers."

It was a lot of work for everyone involved, but a lot of fun. At the end of the last show, there was a sense of relief, but also of some sadness, that we were bringing something that has given so much joy to so many people to an end. There was talk among the actors and crew of making *Rocky Horror* an annual event at Encore! Theater. It's doubtful that will happen. It was something I would definitely do again. But for now, other responsibilities call. Whenever I do something like this again, it won't be another eight years between gigs.

Tuesday, June 30, 2009

THE KING IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE KING

He was a fixture of our lives. He was all over the TV. He was truly a master of his art, and he tragically, unexpectedly died at the relatively young age of 50. No longer will his voice be heard or his unusual image flash on our TVs. He was truly the King— King of Infomercials, Billy Mays.

Oh yeah, and Michael Jackson died, too.

NOTE: I had *much* more written, but decided against posting the rest; not because I don't have anything nice to say, but because I don't know what to say, and in such situations, it's best to remain silent until I can say what I want to say. Suffice it to say for now, I mean no disrespect to the dead.

Saturday, December 5, 2009

HAS IT REALLY BEEN OVER FIVE MONTHS SINCE MY LAST ADVENTURE?

No, I still have adventures everyday of one form or another. Granted, some are more important than others. But this is the forum where I get to talk about whatever pleases me, and you, the reader, must endure. When I was in a performing situation, for witty banter, I would say, "We have suffered for our art. Now it's your turn to suffer."

The year is drawing to a close, and things naturally slow down here. That would be true, even without the recession. South Sound Audio is weathering well. SSA is not beholden to anyone else, so it's going strong. Could be busier, but it's strong.

The decision to postpone *Noise to Cure* to next year was an easy one. A tragedy had occurred and it just wouldn't be right, I felt. It was a no-brainer. I'll have to change some of the information on the album to reflect that it will be released in 2010, but luckily, it's a small release. Look for it on January 16, 2010, on Twilight Records. More Triple Threat music will be coming in 2010.

There wasn't a whole lot of remote recording projects during 2009, and realistically thinking until the economy gets better there may not be a whole lot more during 2010. There are a few things on the distant horizon coming into view that will be great.

Safeco Field is still on my radar. I am still doing occasional work for them, and there are some major projects this month and in January that I'll be part of. Safeco Field is a great place, and I never get tired of being there. Of course, I am a baseball fan, and I keep that in check while working there.

Some theater work is on the horizon for next year, where I will be musical support. That's always fun, and I work with some great people whenever I do that.

As always, new contacts bring new audio or musical possibilities. Who knows where they will lead? Anyway, it's a charmed life.

Tuesday, May 11, 2010

RECENT ARISING

My postings in Adventures in Audio seem to be getting farther apart. This is not for lack of any audio-related adventures— there's still many— but rather for a lack of time, or when I do have time, a lack of motivation. I am in the process of redoing/relocating my studio to another locale in Chez Hall right now. My teenage son has come to live with us, so he will be staying in the room designated for my previous audio exploits. I am eyeing a corner of the garage right now that can be enclosed and acoustically treated. Besides the radio show (which is now on hiatus) and the upcoming Triple Threat album in November, I have plenty of time to get settled in my new digs. I am also in a mad rush to acquire more equipment to expand South Sound Audio. The business model I have is a "pay-as-you-go" model. This ensures that I will never lose the business because of debt.

Once again, I am working with Encore! Theater. The band is the same as the Rocky band, except Nathan's out and Meredith Shanley is in on keyboards. We chugged through the premier weekend of *Rent* and are looking forward to the rest of the run. There's definitely another outing for me with Encore! In the future, in a musical capacity, as well as working with others connected to the theater. But getting back to *Rent*, the music is challenging. As I told

a cast member the other day, "525,000 pages of music..." Of course that means nothing if you're not familiar with the songs. But it was funny at the time. But honestly, this musical outing is not as fun as Rocky, but definitely more fun than Alice.

It also seems there are now more and more opportunities luring me back to the performance side of the business. We'll see how that goes. *Lightning in a Bottle* is slated for a November release, but I'd like to see about getting some more recent material out there. Eventually. Some day. Think concept album. Also, I'd like to get in a position where Eric and I can work together on something. That's no big secret. But I'm still hanging on the "behind the desk" aspect.

So what can you look for before my next installment of Adventures in Audio? The next presidential election? Halley's Comet? No, it won't be that long. Stay posted!

Thursday, July 15, 2010

AHHHHH, SUMMER...

What's my favorite time of the year? Any time of the year. There's something really cool to be enjoyed in any season, but right now, I'm enjoying summer since it's, well, summer. Audio work is slower than it was last year at this time, but it's still steady—a job here, a job there. It could be busier, but it's still okay.

The Family is taking two vacations this summer. The first one just ended, a few days in the wonderful State of Montana, where your humble correspondent made "Montana's Most Wanted." Seems I was going a little too fast through one of their fair hamlets, and the local fuzz pulled me over. Luckily, no points on my ticket.

The second vacation is for a Family reunion in Colorado, a few weeks from now. It's always fun to get away, but vacation is anything but relaxing for me. After a few days, I start worrying about things back at home. Did the house burn down? Did someone break in and steal the equipment that comprises South Sound Audio? It doesn't occupy my every waking thought, but it makes its way into my head from time to time.

Plus I have work to do. I try to schedule things so I can take time off, but invariably something always comes up. When I returned from Montana, I found several "urgent" messages on my phone, as well as some pressing email to take care of. Not to worry, they have been taken care of.

I've also deluded myself into thinking that the change of scenery afforded by this summer's vacations will somehow serve as inspiration for my current round of songwriting for the musical. No such luck. I spent the Montana trip decompressing from any pressures that may have accumulated in my daily life, and I imagine I'll spend the Colorado trip doing the same. Too many distractions. Not that it's a bad thing, though. I just can't write the trips off as a business expense. Gotta stay straight with the IRS.

It's also time to further expand South Sound Audio. I've been thinking about getting a bigger place for a state-of-the-art studio. That'll still be a few years down the road, but I need to start now to get anywhere with it. Maybe take in a partner, I don't know. I don't get to reflect about the future on a daily basis, so you, gentle reader, are subjected to my rants and ravings. Whatever will happen, two things can be assured: 1. South Sound Audio will continue to expand, and 2. It'll be fun. During August, I'll be drawing up a more detailed business model for South Sound Audio. It's still viable in this crummy economy only because the company isn't leveraged to the hilt. It's not leveraged at all, in fact. The business will still operate on a "pay as you play" model.

With this expansion, South Sound Audio will be taking on more and bigger projects. I'm looking forward to that! Have a great summer, folks!

Monday, August 16, 2010

THANK YOU... THANK YOU VERY MUCH...

The morning news reminded me that Elvis Presley, the King of Rock 'n' Roll, died thirty-three years ago today. I would venture to guess that 90% of the people in the music business today weren't alive when he died. That leaves it to "old timers," like myself, to put things in perspective. I'm not really that old, but when Elvis was my age, he had been dead several years.

I never was a die-hard Elvis fan, even when I was a teenager, before he died. He belonged to my parents' generation, and as a thirteen year-old skull full of mush, it wasn't cool to like what your parents like. Still isn't. By the time I was really cognizant of Elvis, his star was setting. He was no longer the tall, cool one in *Clambake* or *Viva Las Vegas*. By 1977, he was the sweaty, porcine, white jump-suited Elvis.

It was a hot August day before the start of a new school year when the radio local radio station announced his death at age 42. The radio station wasn't that "local," being KTSA, 80 miles away in San Antonio. They played non-stop Elvis music for what seemed a week. I looked for a reaction from my parents, since Elvis typified their generation. Wisely, my parents weren't into hero-worship, so while acknowledging the loss, life pretty much went on as usual. I only watched the funeral procession, more out of a sense of morbid curiosity than being an Elvis fan. Elvis wasn't that great, I thought.

Fast forward a few years, Lennon gets shot. He was still technically part of my parents' generation, but kids my age grew up in the shadow of the Beatles. It hit a little closer. Now, as a sixteen year-old, and not following my parents' wise practice not to hero-worship, I felt a loss. I could see why the Beatles were great, vaguely remembering the Beatlemania of the '60s, but *Elvis*?

I didn't appreciate Elvis at the time of his death, being a young dumb kid. Now, as a middle-aged dumb adult, I can analyze the situation and see why Elvis was great, as I could with the Beatles. Elvis not only radically transformed American popular music, but has transformed American popular culture itself. He defined a sense of classic cool that is every bit as relative today as it was over fifty years ago. Most importantly, Elvis broke the race barrier in music. While certain close-minded people wouldn't think of listening to a "race record," as they were called, they wouldn't think twice of listening to the same song re-recorded by a white kid. It wasn't exploitation: Elvis truly loved black music and artists and respected them. Much has been made that Elvis "stole" black music. I don't think that was the case. Elvis introduced black music to a largely white audience. It's a sad thing that the situation had to be like that in 1950's, but it was a first step.

Music before Elvis was pretty staid stuff (think Pat Boone on Valium), but he took it to a new level, with the scandalous hip swivel. Pretty tame stuff my today's standards, but it gave rock a "bad boy" image. He defined what was "cool." Maybe not the sequined jump suits, but the image of Elvis has become a fixture of popular culture. Elvis imitators are everywhere! Sure, it's cheesy, but it's fun. I enjoy it. You now know my secret vice. Elvis' records still sell well, thirty-three years after his death. He's still cited by musicians today as an influence. For all this, I thank him.

To end it all on a high note, here are [Ten Strange Facts About Elvis](#).

Wednesday, September 1, 2010

THIS IS WHAT THE HECK HAPPENED...

I am a straight shooter. It has never been my intention to use this blog, online journal, or whatever you want to call it, to self-glorify. I tell the good, bad, and the ugly. A recent event I was involved in had a little bit of all three. South Sound Audio has always operated as a small, independent unit. Having no debt means that I am not beholden to anyone else as to how I run this business. For the most part, I've done pretty well. But I did let something get out of hand, which affected the business. Something had to give. A few weeks ago, I was talking to a CPA who specializes in small businesses. When she heard about some of the business practices I had, she freaked, to put it mildly. I hadn't been cheating anyone, but instead I had been grossly undercharging for my services. This has stagnated South Sound Audio to the point that it couldn't grow beyond the point where it is right now. Her question to me was, "If other audio people are charging \$X for their services, why in the world would you charge a fraction of that?" To attract and retain business was my feeble reply. WRONG! In short, I messed myself over good. I was not getting any sort of profit, nor was I able to get capital to maintain the equipment I have or get new equipment.

I never said business was my long suit.

My CPA's advice: a radical change in the way I do business, as far as what I charge. She said there is no reason why I shouldn't be charging the same as my colleagues. I shouldn't worry about any business I might lose by charging a comparable rate. People would take advantage and treat me as a "cut rate" if I continue to charge a "cut rate" rate. If people balk at a professional rate, then pass them by.

She's right. That's why she has a big house on an island in the Puget Sound and I don't.

Then I was working a job and I seriously began questioning if I really wanted to work in audio any more. The job was a "perfect storm" of everything that could go wrong going wrong. To top it off, the person who hired me for the job had another sound engineer (!) there, so I was redundant. It became painfully obvious that my role at this gig was to be the star's gopher. I had a serious choice to make— swallow my pride and just take it, or have some self respect and walk.

I chose the latter. I would never quit (and have never in the past quit) gig where I was actually doing something useful, but I wasn't going to act the part of professional sycophant and polish this guy's crown. I calmly told him I was leaving and did so. No fuss or drama (on my part anyway). I texted him that I was out of the audio business, and I meant it. I was done.

In talking with a buddy of mine a few days later, he reaffirmed that I had done the right thing. I also mentioned the CPA's advice. He told me that I shouldn't allow a bad experience to ruin my whole business. I thought seriously about leaving the audio business all together, but many people close to me have persuaded me otherwise. It's a passion of mine, I love it, and in the long run, I couldn't give up the audio business any more than I could cut off my arm. Yes, I feel that strongly about it. So I am in it for the long haul. Quit that customer— not the business.

So where does this leave me now? Some clients did balk when I told them about how things are going to be from now on. One berated me by telling me they could do better than me anyway, yet this person had no problem with my work and then wanted extra copies of work I did for him! I politely— ahem— declined. I've liquidated a lot of my gear and equipment (as well as some clients who don't want to pay) in the past week, but am planning to acquire more in the foreseeable future (my CPA has seen to that). That limits me to the services I can currently provide.

But there will be new clients. In the meanwhile, I am working on in-house projects— the musical, new band, new album, possible band album, contracting out to other studios, etc. There are a lot of new things on the horizon,

and things are still as bright as they ever were, just different now. This is just a time of restructure (possibly bring in a new business partner), and cutting away the dead wood so that other branches can grow. South Sound Audio is entering it's fourth year, and by the beginning of its fifth year, South Sound Audio will be better than ever.

To those of you who have supported South Sound Audio, I humbly thank you, and I look forward to working again in the future and accomplishing great things with you. YOU make everything possible and make me want to continue doing what I do. To those of you who feel differently, you still fail to understand that this is a business, not a hobby. As I wouldn't ask you to perform for me for free, I wouldn't mix your albums for free. I wish you would reconsider, but if not, I wish you well in your future endeavors.

To end this entry on a high note, I am purchasing new recording software for South Sound Audio soon and some new musical instruments for my new extracurricular musical activities. I am buying the instruments out of necessity, since I need a particular *something* and none of my current gear is doing it for me. Here's to bigger and better things!

Wednesday, December 8, 2010

LENNON

Thirty years ago this night I was watching Monday Night Football when Howard Cosell interrupted the proceedings to announce that John Lennon had been shot. I was a high school kid who had purchased a copy of his new album, *Double Fantasy*, a few weeks earlier. I was a huge fan of the Beatles (still am), and was probably feeling like those of my parents' generation when Buddy Holly died in February 1959. It was a shock and a tragedy, but thirty years adds a lot of perspective.

Cue the angry e-mail.

Thirty years on, I learned to separate musicians from their human counterparts: Lennon may have been a great songwriter, but on the human side, there would be very little that he and I would agree upon. We are polar opposites, politically, religiously, philosophically— you name it. I don't think Lennon and I would have been friends. By many accounts, he was distant, bitter, cold, and sarcastic— not the kind I would hang out with. But he made some great music.

The Beatles were larger than the sum of their parts. Not one of them enjoyed the same stature individually as they did together in the Beatles. While I enjoyed some of Lennon's solo material, I found a lot of it self-pitying, and self-absorbed. This is merely my opinion— your mileage may vary. But some of his music (particularly from the Beatles era) has inspired me in ways. It would have been interesting to see what he would've done had he lived. There would almost certainly have been a Beatles reunion somewhere down the road.

I don't mean to seem harsh. It's just that my world didn't revolve around John Lennon, but I am glad that our orbits did cross.