

A Stroll in the Park - Artist Statement

Most of my songs emerge from a phrase that is married to a simple idea. There is a sound in some words that is connected to melody, harmony and rhythm that can be magical, enticing and a place to begin. It emerges from the abyss, or the heavens or from a fleeting muse. All of these compositions start with this spark and from there the work begins - if I care enough about that initial idea.

I'm attracted to simplicity and beauty but am equally attracted to chaos and dissonance. In fact, some measure of chaos and dissonance and rhythmic surprises are essential to hold my interest. Beautiful shiny objects are everywhere but they are happiest when I watch them play or create a playground. I think this is a thread that is found in all these compositions.

Some of my early songs have the usual pop song rhyming scheme. Fairly early on, I think I successfully got away from this. Rhymes are not always necessary if the lyric is an essential part of the music. They can be used for emphasis but are often a cheap crutch. Words and phrases have a music and rhythm in them. If the structure of the song is inherent to the phrase instead of just stuck on there, rhyming isn't as necessary; just as in a poem, The sound of words have character, phrases have melody, rhythm and maybe a story in them.

I began writing music the day I learned my third chord on guitar in 1968. Inspired by the great music and poetry of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, Bob Dylan, Donovan, Joni Mitchell and many others I tried my hand at writing and recording using my guitar, voice and a sound on

sound reel to reel tape recorder. In 1971, I was in a band called Synthesis. We were an acoustic group with 3 part vocal harmonies and 2 guitars. We learned a lot of Crosby, Stills and Nash, James Taylor, Paul Simon and some of my songs. Rick Pfeiler was the primary arranger and guitarist and Guy Windsor (the late), Rick and I were on vocals. Joe Connolly was the other guitarist. We spent hours and hours working on harmonies and were the best of friends. We had an inspiring vocal sound. *Thunderstorm*, on this album, is from this period. I reharmonized the chords and changed the rhythm and the feel. Most of the song alternates between $\frac{5}{8}$ and $\frac{6}{8}$ time.

I went to college and Synthesis changed personnel and style and morphed into a band called Listen. I wrote a bunch of songs and we learned a few of them. Most of the members of this band went on to become professional musicians and their great musical ideas helped me develop some interesting composition ideas. Rick Pfeiler, John Schultz (the late) and Karen Holvick all contributed to some great music and John Spike taught me what a great drummer should be. I eventually quit as I realized I was more serious about philosophy and history than music. *Heart of the Morning*, on the album, is from this period. Karen wrote a vocal line that is now played on trumpet and it's twice as fast.

I moved to Kansas City as a VISTA volunteer and had a lot of evenings in my apartment to noodle around on my guitar and I continued playing with longtime friend Byron Jones (trumpet) and started playing with longtime friend, Bill Woodhouse. I wrote *That Time Ain't Now* and *No More Discussion (now called Haven't Had Enough)* during this period. Byron, Bill and I were trying to play bop tunes. Charlie Parker had a tune called *Now Is the Time*. *That Time Ain't Now* was my response to that title.

I studied classical guitar with Douglas Niedt (guitar professor at UMKC) for a few years and then studied applied jazz theory with John Elliot (jazz pianist and master jazz teacher). *Orbus Elipticus* came out of this period. On this album it's arranged for horns, guitar, bass and drums.

I fell in love. Regina Compennolle, her daughter Cara and I married. We had another baby, Kalen. Life was intense and full. We were in a Jungian/Gestalt therapy group and the song *River* emerged from a dream. Musically I was attempting to write a fairly simple line that always ends up in a different place. I started experimenting with rhyming sparingly or for rare emphasis. *Only Your Name Remains* was my first attempt at writing concert music. It started out just for guitar and voice but the vocal part became an oboe in one section and a trumpet line in another section. It's now arranged for a small orchestral ensemble (not yet recorded).

I was introduced to an original poem by, good friend, Carl Bettis. *Atnas Sulac* is a deranged folk tale about a character who is the antithesis of Santa Clause. My idea was to write a beautiful folk song to the lyrics to make it as ironic as possible. I edited the poem to fit the song and added a few lines to complete the verses.

Deanne was loosely inspired by a dynamic good friend who was going through a divorce and a lot of emotional trauma. It explores freedom and creativity out of death and loss. The music reflects back to Crosby, Stills and Nash and certainly Joni Mitchell, in my mind, but the middle section is more modal and jazzy and was added recently. One of Miles Davis's favorite songs was *Guenevere*, by David Crosby. When Crosby heard Miles take he hated it. Much later, Crosby understood it better. That song is iconic. There is more crossover here than often thought.

I started attending the Winfield Music Festival once a year and Bill Woodhouse and I were playing mandolin and guitar together. Three songs that were influenced by bluegrass, newgrass, my experience at Winfield, playing with Bill but also influenced by jazz and other music include *Outside Dawg*, *Winfield Suite*, and *But I Lost It*.

Outside Dawg was written about our dog Kehoe. He had a penchant from jumping over or digging under any fence. Regina used to lure him back into the car by taking him to McDonalds for a hamburger. His wanderings became longer and at one point he was missing for several weeks. He came back looking like a homeless guy. After getting a few meals he hit the road again and we never saw him again. The music reflects a happy dog, freely grooving.

Winfield Suite was written right after attending Winfield one year. It's inspiring to hear that much acoustic music in the air. There are so many styles and creative musicians there. I tried to put together a suite that represented different moods and hint at ideas I took from my experiences there. I added the mandolin, violin and dobro lines much later. I wanted driving drums in the first section but didn't know how to verbalize it. Jeffery Ruckman suggested the drum feel from "Sing, Sing, Sing" by the great Gene Krupa .i love it.

But I Lost is another attempt at taking some rural music ideas and adding some weirdness to them. The song keeps going further out until it abruptly slows down and goes minor. Clarke plays both the banjo and Farfisa organ part brilliantly.

I started studying composition with my daughter's piano teacher, Jeffery Ruckman. We became great friends. Many great conversations, arrangements and compositions emerged. *A Solaz* and *A Stroll in the Park* are my favorite originals that came out of this work but Jeffery's encouragement to arrange, improve and

question are reflected everywhere in this project.

I became frustrated and had no outlet to get my pieces played. I decided I just wanted to play, arrange standards for guitar and play with just a bass player to give myself more room to improvise and make rehearsals and playing gigs easier. I found several bassists who were not playing with anyone. Paul Leigh who now lives in Portland was my first victim. John Nichols was next who is now playing with the amazing Arnie Young. I am currently playing with John Miles and sometimes Johnny Hamil. All of these bassists are exceptional and I am so fortunate to play music with them. I've been primarily playing in this duo format for the last 20 years. I also play with Last Free Exit, Bill Woodhouse on mandolin and guitar and Sam the Man on Bass, and played for a while in Gypsy Fingers KC which features Gypsy Jazz and primarily music of Django Reinhardt. I continue to play in the Cynthia Van Roden Trio or Quartet. Byron Jones also plays trumpet in many of these bands.

Almost all of these songs and compositions were written and performed a long time ago. The one exception is Last Song which is bardoesque, a liminal state between death and rebirth. The song uses primarily jazz like chords and even swings a little but is totally composed except for the percussion and piano.

Throughout the years I have been influenced by many musicians. The composers that have most grabbed my ear over the years for various reasons are: Wayne Shorter, John Lennon, David Crosby, Bartok, Joni Mitchell, Miles Davis, Frank Zappa (especially Yellow Shark), Donovan, Bill Frisell, Django Reinhardt, Duke Ellington and Colin Nancarrow.

A few years ago a friend and musician I hadn't seen in years died suddenly and the project to compile, rearrange, chart, perform and record this collection became relevant. I contacted

Jeffery Ruckman and asked if he would help me chart this music; many of them were sketched out but needed attention. This became a one year project. Jeffery is an incredible friend, musician and teacher. He challenged me to look around corners for new ideas, corrected many mistakes, and gave me courage and support to reharmonize old ideas.

Finally, we thought the project was ready to record and Covid 19 hit. It became impossible to get together in a studio. After many months of unsuccessful attempts at getting together we finally began recording rhythm tracks (guitar, keys, bass, drums and scratch vocals). The basic band is Jeffery Ruckman on piano and organ, Johnny Hamil or John Miles on acoustic bass, Brian Steevers on drums, and me on my hand made guitars. We recorded most of the rhythm tracks at Chad Meise's studio and then began the arduous but enjoyable work of adding tracks at Clark Wyatt's studio (and by coincidence my old house and where I wrote some of these songs when I lived there).

Clarke's contribution to this project can not be overestimated. He's been with me for two years, recording, rerecording, cutting, fixing, listening, and helping me make musical decisions, sometimes insisting. His encouragement has kept me going. He has great ears and a willingness to try stuff. I am so happy with the end result and many grand and tiny decisions were made with Clarke.

The musicians assisting with this project are simply the best. Where I wrote notes, they interpreted. Where I left space, they developed ideas. I'm amazed at their commitment and artistic contribution. Thank you. Please read the bios page for information on them and their projects.

Regina Compennolle, my friend, partner in life and illustrator on this project, has been supportive of my art - always. Seeking truth through expression is her greatest gift and she supports that in me and everyone around her.

This is where I could use your help. This project cost much more than I will ever recoup from it and I'm not done. There are several more compositions I would like to record and more that need to be written. You can purchase a CD or pay for a download on Bandcamp. You are welcome to pay more and help support this and future projects.

\$12 - Download

\$15 - CD

\$50 - Get a signed CD and much thanks

\$100 - If you want to help a lot

\$500 - Wow

\$1000 - May as well ask

Thanks for reading this.