

Peter's Story

Butterfly on the wall

In 1975, at 21,
I joined the band Timmy.
I had just left the nightclub circuit, disgusted and done.
I was now sworn to be a starving artist.

We became the band to warm up all the progressive acts that came to town.
Acts such as : The Dixie Dregs, Alan Holdsworth, Bill Bruford, Captain Beefheart.

We somehow attracted a notorious English Rock Manager, Tony Secunda.
Tony had discovered, and screwed, Procol Harem, The Moody Blues, Denny Laine, Chrissy Hynde, Marc Bolan, Steeleye Span, Motorhead, and others.
We were also the rebound relationship for Andy West, who was just rebounding from the Dregs break up.

In 1984, we went to Eddy Offord Studio in Atlanta. Eddy had produced Yes and ELP, and engineered the Imagine album.

I partnered with Eddy on two different demo projects. Eddy was not a musician, but had great ideas. My function was to actualize Eddy's ideas musically. We had a sweet minute.

Around the same time, we were also courted by another rock manager, Lyndy, who had this little indy band, The Red Hot Chili Peppers. Time came when we had to make an executive decision, and choose a manager. We as a band chose Tony. I was on the call to inform Lyndy. Bad call.

Also, around this time, Eddy hired me for a 2nd demo project. A client was looking for an old friend, a keyboardist/guitarist from California, to no avail. Eddy suggested me, and as it turned out, I was that California musician that my friend Bobby Barth (Axe) was looking for in the 1st place. Add to that, Bobby was managed by Al Nali, who was an old friend of my brother Butch. They were based in Ann Arbor MI.

(When I was 16, we rented a guitar and amp from Nali's Music Store when I spent the summer with Butch and family outside of Detroit. On another visit I met the Brownsville Station guys. Years later, '84, when coming to rehearse with Bobby in Ann Arbor, ran into Mike, the bass player of Brownsville. Sweet guy. Very gracious.)

Anyway, Bobby and I rehearsed an album, then he, Al, and I drove to Atlanta to record with Eddy. I beat T Lavitz out of the gig, much to his chagrin. T was like the best piano player on Earth, having toured with the Dregs. Eddy somehow preferred my pop sensibility I guess, and we worked well as a team. Eddy introduced me to Bushmill's.

Al had promised me an extra grand for the session. He also lectured me on how to hold out for better pay. Not my style. Needless to say, regardless of small world/cosmic connections, life is also not without its ironies. Al did not pay. That cost him his friendship with my brother.

My favorite takeaway from my time working with Eddy, was a story he shared: while working on the Imagine album with John Lennon. John, fresh from the creative blast, albeit naturally subjugated time with the Beatles, had one rule in the studio: no squashing of ideas. There is time to try everything. Subtle, yet freedom inducing. A spiritual concept that says don't hold down your brother, let him live his own life, express, not hold in, his feelings. From John, to Eddy, to me. Which correlates with my own Martial studies, and good spirituality in general. (I should add here: The 2nd noble truth; Yang Tai Chi of stretching, but not stiffly, yet also not empty; all the same stuff. We dream, it is natural, yet not too rigidly, yet also not empty. Weight is on the north, the feet point south. It's all the same stuff: Relax, be good company. Sure, elbows, but unconditionally. We aspire.)

Another musician of note around this time was Mark Rooster Richardson, a dear friend, and friend of my band-mates from their days growing up in Buckhead, GA. One night while quietly hanging in my loft above our rehearsal studio in San Rafael CA, Rooster knocks on the door. Peter, can we come up? Mark had just been engineering at Fantasy, with Mitch Mitchell. It happened to be Mitch's 40th birthday. The three of us hung in the loft till the wee hours partying, laughing, sharing music, and having a blast. A power trio, sans instruments. A very fun night. Mitch could not have been more normal, fun, non-rock star-ish. Like a cool trust fund kid. Fun memory.

Throughout all this, while we were pining for "a deal" (since 21), rubbing a few elbows, which gave us the hope of a little carrot being out there somewhere (I hung on for "two weeks" for 13 years!), we were watching some of our contemporaries get a little taste of success, for which we were very happy. And excited. The guys with less money will always appear more hungry. Tony, who was acquainted with many a record co. president, shopped our demo from Eddy. They all loved it. All the A and R guys didn't know what to do with it. Prog was long dead by this time. We never really left the rehearsal studio, legends that we were, in our minds, and the minds of a handful of others.

This also somehow beautifully supported my own vow of poverty. We watched our neighbors and friends, Huey Lewis and the News (directly across the Court of the rehearsal compound, A Brown Soun', that John from Timmy started, where I slept for 13 years in various halls and offices, that hosted over the years: the Sons of Champlin, members of Prince, Keith Richards and Tom Waits, to name a few), change in one day from beat up Volkswagens and station wagons, to Mercedes, Beamers, and Vettes.

Young Mike Varney, who had booked us when he was 16, had just found success as a record producer, later to become the kingpin of Metal in the world. Fellow stray Jeff Pilson joined Dokken for years, then Foreigner.

Cut to the late 90s, my friend Zach got hired by Jack Johnson. Instant success. I can only be happy for all these guys. I mean, what are the odds? To be a fly on the wall to this degree was pretty fascinating.

Another friend in the mix, long time hero and mentor, Vince Welnick of the Tubes, co-produced Timmy's next album. He then got hired by Jerry Garcia to join the Dead. They immediately paid off all his credit cards. Vince bought a villa in Cancun. Then Jerry died. Vince took his own life shortly after. Too close to the sun, me guesses.

Around 1980, I met musician and friend Mark Bridges, who came by to buy some equipment. Turns out he was into Kung Fu. That started a life-long friendship, and a delving into the martial art world. Philosophically, martial art can support the concept of starving artistry. I've never had a problem with it. Money? Sure. But that's never been the way. Yet I still sit here, pushing 70, pining as I did at 21, gee a swimming pool would be nice. Kind of silly. Just a program, to which I am not attached, just play around with. Like Gollum holding on to the "precious" with dear life, while drowning and burning in the fires of Mordor. Very silly exercise.

But I've always entertained myself with trivia. And I find it fascinating my own fly on the wall rock and roll karma, and the rock and roll karma in the family. Brother Butch in his tenure as rock DJ, elbows to many rock stars; his son Art Jr., managing (with panache and good reputation) the likes of Bob Segar, Kid Rock and The Black Pumas... while we were all waiting around for the ship to somehow come in, Art merely pulls the sword out of the stone. You see, it did happen to us, vicariously through the vessel of beloved unsuspecting nephew Art Jr. Yay! Shuttle in! And nicest, sweetest guy in show business, and in life);

Cousin John having managed Fairport Convention, and booking the Ravens (the Kinks) when he was 14... the small world-trivia-elbow-who cares in the long run list goes on and on.

Also on the fly-on-the-wall list: my time at Lucasfilm between 81-84. Courted by Mike Khan, Steve's editor for most of his movies: set up editing at George's house, just fly on the wall stuff. Here goes the WWI flying ace, kind of thing. Fun memories. Weirdly serendipitous and synchronistic.

Never to alter my vow of poverty however. Keep Peter humble says the universe. Which I embrace and am fine with.

Yet here at almost 68, I pine for the "deal", which is kind of hilarious. Also know gladly about the 2nd noble truth. It is natural to desire. Let that happen. It is wise to have learned how not to expect. That's where I am. That's where I've always been, really. Happy for the success of others. I do not argue with success. Fine in my own monk-karma body. I mean it's been a lifetime. I think I kind of have the drill down by now.

Still I am in touch with Mike Varney. for old time's sake. He likes some of my stuff. Like there's any monetary potential? Especially at this stage? Pretty funny. It's the thought that counts. I like being liked.

Also in the wind, my collaboration with another old pal, Bernie Chiaravalle, who found some success with Michael McDonald over the years. Bernie was kind enough to channel beautiful words and production to a piano piece I've had laying around for 50 years. I Rely on Your Grace. The single is out, and the album comes out in Jan. 22. Again, likely doomed to obscurity, but it is the thought that counts. I am very moved by Bernie's work, and very proud of the track. It is a track I can rest my laurels on.

Addendum: I suffered a stroke on Feb 1 2020. The pandemic hit a month and a half later. While in the hospital, on comes a TV show. A musical, starring a former student, who suffers an MRI accident, begins hallucinating the world around her breaking into song, including her aphasia ridden father.

Huge part of my stroke recovery, in more ways than one. I mean what are the odds? The world is weird and mysterious at the very least.

Part of my permanent damage is that I am easily labile. I love "love". I love talent. I love genius. I love synchronicity. I love elbows. I love not taking any of it seriously. Of course I also cry in fear. Between fear and gratitude. Sometimes I cannot tell the difference. It all makes me cry. I am very grateful.

(Another fly on the wall story: teacher and friend Wally Hedrick, famous artist, arguably the 1st Beatnik, ever. Hires me to cover piano on the Wharf one night. We are driving to the gig. So Peter, what are you up to? Oh we have a famous rock manager, bass player, and producer, and we are shopping for a deal. Oh, he said. So you take yourself seriously, do you? That stays with me to this very day. Perspective. Priorities. Taoist/Beatnik/Hippie leanings.

Trivia. Yeah I love the World Almanac and IMDB and elbow stories. It's my hobby. Fun. But in the scheme of things? Love. And family. And friends. And the thoughts that count.

Great new movie. Don't Look Up. About impending doom, and the ennui and myriad distractions, the silliness of rubbing elbows as an important something in the face of certain doom, or more shall we say perhaps a bit more important subjects. Like impending doom, or... Impending beauty of the right here and now. It's all fun and games. It's all perspective. Depravity. Original Sin. We all have it to one degree or another. Let him without sin... the trick is moving from conditional giving, to however far in the direction of unconditional love, allowing, not holding, as any one reasonably can, or is their karma to do, in any given lifetime. Compassion for all paths. We'll all get there some day. In the words of my teacher's teacher: All You Need Is Love.

Summary:

It is said it is good Karma to be born into a Spiritual Family.

Even better if there are riches involved.

With the world's predilection on Fame, Success, and Celebrity, we all know these things are false, and that you cannot take them with you.

Still,, it has been my Karma to be involved with Rock and Roll. I love rubbing elbows. I celebrate my serendipitous relationships. Fun to know a few rock legends. Even more so, that in the end, what matters is heart. Four legends come to mind, Bernie Chiaravalle, Johnny Colla, Mike Varney. my own nephew Art. These are all men with heart and integrity. I am fortunate to count these among my friends. There are of course many more. John Lovrien, who has found his musical success through the Christian Network. Quite appropriate for him. Work, sans notoriety. He is a beloved brother from another mother.

Flip to my other unbelievable fortunate experience. That of the martial art and meditation world. Let's just say that somehow I have been blessed to be around the very best.

My own roommate situation, other than just 4 old guys.

Jim and his experiences as a fellow student of Ram Das under the tutelage of Neem Karoli Baba, as well as his studies with Kuo Lien-Yng, General under Chaing Kai Shek, as well as famed SF Shaolin Sifu; roommate, and best acid buddy from college, Bill, who is the Godson of Ken Kesey....

What a life.

I am so grateful.

From Alpha to Omega, nothing but gratitude.

Career Highlights

* Timmy warming up Bill Bruford at Keystone Palo Alto, owning it, at the top of our form, in front of the Stanford crowd, which as it turned out, was our crowd.

*The Liddie's horns and strings and I joined the Sun Kings for Monterey Pop 40th, performing Sgt. Pepper's in its entirety, I was conductor/keyboardist/guitarist. 6 o'clock main-stage, Sat. night slot. We slayed it... and them.

That same summer, 2007, played bass on the Mountain for "Hair".

*A dozen Beatles in the Park starring the Liddypudlians. All You Need Is Love.

* A myriad of children's musicals: Faves: Hair; Little Shop; Into the Woods