



## Bob Livingston **“Mahatma Gandhi & Sitting Bull”** Vireo Records

Livingston, a Lubbock born and bred Texan, has played bass in Jerry Jeff Walker’s road band for decades, and has also worked with Michael Martin Murphey, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Bobby Bridger and other Texas based songwriters. He’s a founding member of the legendary Lost Gonzo Band. For the past decade and a half, under the auspices of the U.S. State Department, Livingston has performed his music, initially [and almost annually] in India, and subsequently in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Burma, and the Middle East. **“Mahatma Gandhi & Sitting Bull”** is Bob’s fourth solo recording and co-produced the disc with another equally famous son of Lubbock, Lloyd Maines.

The principle that underlies the construction of **“Mahatma Gandhi & Sitting Bull,”** is the marriage of Western music – *albeit, mainly country and western, leavened with flashes of reggae and good old rock ‘n’ roll* – with Eastern music – *in truth, the classical form that prevails in the Asian sub-continent of India.* Alongside a virtual A to Z of Austin session musicians, the Indian contingent of players on this recording amounts to Oliver Rajamani [tabla], Amjad Rahman [tabla/harmonium] and on one cut, the voices of the Vedic Chanters.

Having already mentioned Livingston’s musical association with Michael Martin Murphey and Bobby Bridger, it’s worth noting in the case of the former that the self-penned material on his early career albums – say **“Geronimo’s Cadillac”** [1972] through **“Flowing Free Forever”** [1976] – contained a liberal measure of lyrical references to Native American life and legend. As for Bobby Bridger, while his writing is heavily influenced by comparable sources – principally the works of Black Elk - in the process of creation, a Bridger lyric takes on an undeniably spiritual edge. In fact, here, Bridger collaborated with Livingston on the album title cut and “Cowboys And Indians.” Bob’s other collaborators include his wife Iris [a spiritually motivated woman who spent many years living in India studying its culture and religion], sons Tucker and Trevor, as well as fellow Gonzo and class electric guitarist John Inmon, and on two cuts, Reade Wood. The only cover song is Steve Martinec’s “Rainin’ For So Long,” while the lyric that supports the closing cut “Cowboys And Indians Return” is drawn from Edwin Markham’s [1852 - 1940] poem **“A Creed.”**

The almost one-minute long atmospheric, *ethereal even*, opening instrumental, “Prelude,” prominently features a harmonium and tabla. Employing the same melody, the thirty-second long “A Slight Breath,” immediately precedes “Cowboys & Indians Return.” Co-written with Iris and Tucker, the second verse of “Original Spirit” includes *“Every morning she walks out to the holy ground, Where the ancient music is playing, And she begins to sing as the rain falls down, Like a thousand Voices are praying”* – knowing the Livingston’s life history, this lyric leaves me with little doubt that “she” is a reference to Iris. History tells us that Sitting Bull lived from 1831 to 1890, while Gandhi was born in 1869 and died aged seventy-eight. The foregoing dates present *the possibility* that the pair could have met. Gandhi studied for the Bar [\*] in London between 1888 and 1891, and according to Bobby Bridger’s book **“Buffalo Bill And Sitting Bull”** [ISBN 0-292-70917-X] during 1885 Sitting Bull worked in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, but only in the States, and then returned to the Lakota reservation. In truth “Mahatma Gandhi & Sitting Bull” is the story/*fantasy* of two men [one from the East and one for the West, both Indian by birth] who tirelessly sought to bring peace to their respective nations. Both were assassinated in the attempt.

The ballad “On A Dream With You,” features a duet vocal by Bob and Eliza Gilkyson, “Take Advantage Of Your Chances” is one of this collection’s up-tempo numbers, while “I Believe It!” is underpinned by a spiritual theme. The prominent sitar sound on “Cowboys & Indians” is the work of guitarist extraordinaire John Inmon. Bob co-wrote “Love Cannot Be Broken” with his son Trevor, while, like “I Believe It!,” “The

Prophet Said,” also a Reade Wood co-write, is lyrically propelled by spirituality. The same could almost be said for “Wilderness Song,” albeit couched in the voice of a [*temporarily?*] lost soul. The penultimate song, “When The Beat Was Young,” is appropriately titled since this boisterous number recalls the rock’n’roll – or should I say pop’n’roll - purveyed by Buddy Holly, as well as the beat music of The Beatles. While the former was raised in Lubbock, Texas, the latter Liverpoolian group were heavily influenced by his music.

So there you have it folks, they said that never the twain could meet, but on “**Mahatma Ghandi & Sitting Bull**” East truly meets West.

**Note.**

[\*] – Ghandi was studying to become a lawyer.

Folkwax Rating 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 10/04