

Tom Pacheco talks about “The Long Walk”

The interview with Tom Pacheco took place on Sunday 21st March 2004. Tom was at home in Woodstock, New York and I was at home in Birmingham, England. In order to gain an understanding of Tom Pacheco's extensive musical background, before reading this interview it may be worth checking his biography that is lodged on the Folkwax web site at [\[hot spot to web site\]](#). We began this interview by talking about how the band, The Long Walk, was formed.....

“The Long Walk” – forming the band, gigging and making the album

Tom Pacheco It started with a fellow named Tom Skjeklesaether. He's a roots journalist in Norway. He heard the album “**Eagle In The Rain**” and called me up in Dublin one night. He got my phone number from Clive Hudson [**Ed. Note.** Owner of Round Tower Records the Dublin based label that issued “**Eagle..**” [1989]] and said, “*You have to come to Norway.*” At that time in my life, I hadn't even thought of Norway. In 1990 I was still making my first forays into England and Europe. After completing a tour in Italy, I drove all the way to Norway with Clive and did three shows. Skjeklesaether was executive producer of the Tom Russell albums “**The Road To Bayamon,**” “**Poor Man's Dream**” and “**Hurricane Season,**” and was involved in putting together my “**Bluefields**” album. When I played Norway we'd see each other, and about two years ago we started talking about this project. He said, “*Why don't we try something totally different and have a band of young players performing your songs. It doesn't have to change what you're doing. It's merely a different approach.*” I said “*Sure.*” I'm always one that will try somebody new, because I've made albums in Nashville, England, Ireland, Norway and in California, years ago. Last May after I played England, I went to Norway for some solo shows and some with Steinar. While I was there, Tom arranged for me to go down to Halden, a town on the Norway/Sweden border, and meet these guys who were playing in different bands. One guy is Swedish, one is Danish but lives in Norway, and a couple of guys are Norwegian. We did a demo of three songs, real quick. I was only there for three days maybe, and we got along well. They shopped the demo over the summer, but didn't get anything. In the end they decided to make an album on speculation, if I would go there in August, for a month. And not just rehearse and go in the studio, but rehearse and go do gigs then record an album. Take the songs out on the road to clubs, and see if it would work. The gigs gave us the opportunity to tighten up the songs. That's exactly what we did. We spent a whole week rehearsing, and in the clubs we got a really good response, especially from young people.

Folkwax How many gigs did you play.

TP Probably five gigs that lasted an hour and a half each.

FW Spread over how long.

TP About seven days. I think we did one in a little border town and I couldn't tell you if it was Norway or Sweden [Laughs]. It was this dark rock 'n' roll club. It went well. Really, really well. We went out on the road this last trip too, when the album was released in February this year. And we went into Sweden. Just kept tightening up all the time.

FW What songs were on the three-song demo that you did in May 2003.

TP “Che.” “There Was A Me Before There Was You” and the third one was, “The Last Rolling Stone.”

FW In terms of Skjeklesaether's concept of putting Tom Pacheco in front of a band, I was wondering if he had heard the Hellhounds bootleg made in Austin in the early eighties. I imagine that The Hellhounds had a much harder sound than the solo recordings you released from 1989 onwards.

TP It was absolutely a harder sound, but he'd never heard that recording. He had seen me sit in with a couple of rock bands in Norway, over the years, and sing with them. I don't think he was really aware that I had previously played in rock bands.

FW Had you met producer Kai Andersen before.

TP Yes, I'd met him a couple of times when I'd done gigs in that part of Norway. Tom Skjeklesaether had introduced me to him, but we'd never sat down and talked before this album.

FW Andersen worked on two of the three Tom Russell albums from the late eighties/early nineties that Skjeklesaether was involved in.

TP I think they were recorded in the same studio, if I'm not mistaken, but I wouldn't swear to that. Kai has had that studio since the eighties. He has one of Tom Russell's albums on his wall [**Ed. Note.** The album is more than likely "**Hurricane Season.**" It's the only disc of the three recorded in Halden. The other albums were cut at Bel Studios in Oslo]. He has gradually built a big studio there but it's not digital, it's all analog. He has a huge Neve board of which there aren't many left in the world nowadays. It's a beautiful studio, and he has lovingly built it himself. He's a wonderful guy. As gentle a soul as you'd ever want to meet.

FW How long did the recording sessions last.

TP Well, I'd say we were so tight by the time we went into the studio to record, that the whole thing was finished in two weeks. We had spent an intense week rehearsing. Then an intense week on the road with sound checks and all that that involves. We actually cut ten tracks, but one song was left off – you might have heard it last year, because I had just written it – "Not In My Name." It's the one track that didn't really work out in the studio. We still didn't have a deal. While we were mixing the album – and adding a couple of harmony vocals – four guys from Playground Records came down. This would now be something like September 10th of last year, and they loved it. They said, "*We want to put this out.*" So then we had a deal. The album was released on February 16th 2004 in Scandinavia.

FW When you were recording, were you cutting everything live including the vocals.

TP Half of it is live. "Juan Romero" I sang and played live. "Graeme Livingstone" is live. "Living Alone" is live. "Not In My Name" was live too, but that was unused. We played all the basic tracks live. Some of my acoustic guitar things I kept, and some I overdubbed.

FW How old are the guys in the band.

TP They are all aged from twenty eight to thirty-one.

FW And they had never played with each other before.

TP No, they had all played with different groups.

FW Was this mainly in the Halden area, because it's on the border with Sweden.

TP No, all over the place. One of the guitar players, Fredrik Viklund, is based in Gothenburg, Sweden and he plays all over in groups. The other guitar player, Freddy Holm, plays in a Norwegian band called El Corazon. They wanted to get together and see if we could do something a little different.

FW Do they play roots and Americana music in those bands, or are they in rock or punk bands.

TP The guy from Sweden plays a lot of roots stuff on the slide guitar and dobro. They play all kinds of music from blues to rock. They astonished me, because they have a good background in current bands like Outkast back to Pearl Jam in the early nineties. Freddy Holm's favourite band, ever, is The Beatles.

FW In terms of the wide range of sounds that you ended up getting – for instance, the guitar sounds on the opening pair of tracks almost sounds like grunge, while later on they lighten up and although they're not acoustic they're leaning that way.

TP Exactly.

FW Relative to say The Hellhounds, is this the most rock 'n' roll band that you've been a member of.

TP Yes. Absolutely. And more so than the “**Woodstock Winter**” album that I did with The Band. I didn’t want to tell the guys in The Long Walk what to play. I wanted to have them have their own -

FW Freedom of expression.

TP Yeah. I play “There Was A Me Before There Was You” on an open stringed acoustic guitar. I played it for them and said, “*Just listen to the lyrics and interpret it the way you want.*” I wanted to bring everybody’s feedback into the songs. With the song “Che,” Freddy Holm overdubbed some stuff. If you listen to his guitar lines, he does something different on the guitar in every single verse.

FW Did the musicians surprise you, in a way, with what they came up with.

TP They did. They really did. I didn’t know what to expect. I had no idea. I just showed up with a couple of acoustic guitars and twenty-five songs. Originally, we were going to call the band Trail Of Tears. Then we found out that there was a hardcore, death metal Scandinavian band that had the same name. We changed that pretty quickly [Laughs].

FW You just touched on my next question, which is, why was the band called The Long Walk.

TP It’s sort of a combination of things. The band members said, “*Tom, this describes your life in music*” [Laughs] – as being a very long walk. I can recall laughing at that and replying “*Yeah, you are really right, it has been a long walk. Mostly walking too.*”

FW Who actually came up with the name The Long Walk. Was it you, or someone else.

TP I think Tom Skjeklesaether might have. There was something called The Longest Walk that took place in the late seventies, maybe ’79 or ’78 [**Ed. Note.** On 8th February 1978 a group left San Francisco and on July 15th arrived in Washington DC some 30,000 strong] where Native Americans walked across America for Indian Rights. Dan Cleveland put it all together. One time I had seven or eight of them stay at my house in Mount Tremper, sleeping all over the floor, and eating me out of house and home [Laughs]. The name came from that and a lot of other sources. The picture on the front of the album cover is actually the son of Tom Skjeklesaether, taken in Austin, Texas.

FW All it says on the CD liner booklet is *Knut Gustav, two years old, Austin, Tx. in 1994.*

TP I call him KG and he speaks perfect English. He’s now, what, twelve and speaks like an American kid. I saw that photograph on Tom’s wall in May 2003, and said “*What a great album cover that would make in terms of the young people. You know, still fiercely fighting.*” What I saw was that young boy with a guitar slung over his shoulder, singing into the handlebar of his bicycle.

FW It’s the neatest microphone I’ve ever seen. It could set a new fashion.

TP I thought “*God, what a wonderful thing,*” here was a kid with some social idealism, as a symbol of this music going on and on and on through the generations. Tom, of course, was delighted because it was his son.

FW How were the songs on the album selected.

TP We sat around, including Tom Skjeklesaether, and I played them the songs. I knew that I couldn’t record twenty-five songs [Laughs]. I wanted them all to have feedback, so I said, “*Just pick the ones you want.*” After they were picked, we didn’t walk in and start playing. We sat and discussed things – how we would approach each song. I learned that approach from hanging around with Rick, Levon and Garth during “**Woodstock Winter.**” I asked them, “*When you guys did the second Band album in Sammy Davis Jr.’s house in California, how did you approach it.*” They basically said they would sit and talk about the songs. And say “*Well you know, this line is a sympathetic line*” – like, when Mick Jagger walks into his flat – this crummy flat – in my song “The Last Rolling Stone,” you hear a guitar line come in, and I mention the gold ring that Jimi Hendrix had given him, and you hear this very sympathetic, sweet, haunting, guitar line that Freddy Holm played. You know, stuff like that.

FW The CD liner booklet includes a dedication to Johnny Cash [d. Sept. 12th 2003] and Warren Zevon [d. 7th Sept. 2003].

TP They both died while we were recording/mixing the album. I liked Warren Zevon, and of course, Johnny Cash has always been one of my idols. We were sitting in the studio and realised that two very important people had died. Tom Skjeklesaether in his inimitable, humorous way – Tom is in his fifties – made a funny remark to break down all of this sadness we felt, especially when Cash died. He said, “*Well, at least we still have Kurt.*” Kurt [Nilsen] was the “Pop Idol” winner in Norway and eventually took the world title. He turned around deadpan and said that, and everybody just burst out laughing. It kind of broke the tension.

FW Was it a conscious decision to release the album under the name, The Long Walk.

TP Yes. In Norway I’m well known because of Steinar and all the songs I’ve written. That caused a bit of a backlash in the Norwegian press. It’s like they judge me harder – you know what I mean - with each new disc I release. You don’t get bad reviews, but they have a system that goes from 1 to 6 on the dice. They give a 6 for, possibly, one album a year. They may give me a great review in print, but on the dice instead of giving me a 5, they’ll give me a 4.

FW Will there be more Long Walk albums.

TP If we can get this one out all over the place, the band really wants to do another album. We would love to do one a year. I’d be more than happy to fly over next Fall and do it the same way. It really worked in the sense of fleshing the songs out.

To be continued

Arthur Wood.
Kerrville Kronikles 04/04
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