

Tom Pacheco - One Of America's Greatest Songwriting Treasures - Part I

Our story begins sixty miles South East of Boston, in the town of New Bedford, on November 4th 1946, the day Tom Pacheco was born, the eldest of a family of nine children. In the late nineteen thirties his father, Tony, a jazz musician had moved to France to work, but returned to America after World War II broke out. He soon found himself back in Europe, serving as a GI. Prior to the outbreak of war, Tony had worked in Paris with guitarist Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grapelli, the violinist. When Reinhardt toured America in the early nineteen fifties, Tony met him again. In fact, that meeting is one of Tom's earliest musical memories. It's not unnatural because of his interests, and chosen trade, that Tony Pacheco, without using coercion, taught all of his children to play at least one musical instrument. Tom is the only sibling to have made a lifelong career of writing and performing songs, although, as we shall see, many of the Pacheco offspring possess considerable artistic talents.

Concurrent with having his first guitar lessons at the age of ten, on classical and flamenco guitars, Tom would visit a nearby neighbour. She was originally from North Carolina, and introduced Tom to country music through the music of Patsy Cline and Hank Williams Snr. In his mid-teen years, through school friends he became acquainted with the music of Phil Ochs, Bob Dylan and Woody Guthrie. At the age of seventeen Tom left home to attend Dean Junior College in Franklin, Massachusetts. He subsequently moved on to Hofstra University on Long Island, New York and Greenwich Village became Tom's base in the city. Commuting to University, come the evening Tom could be found performing in legendary Village clubs such as The Night Owl Café, The Cafe Wha, The Au Go Go and The Bitter End. A couple of years earlier, and already a confirmed fan of singer/songwriters, Tom had made occasional forays into Boston to see *his heroes* play at Club 47. At that time the club was managed by Jim Rooney. Performed by none other than Dylan, Tom clearly recalls hearing "*Mr. Tambourine Man*" for the first time at the Harvard Square venue.

With a catalogue that consists of two singles, Tom led a legendary Greenwich Village band called The Ragamuffins during the mid-sixties. The initial line-up consisted of Tom's brother Paul on bass, his cousin Larry Vera on drums, plus vocalist Sharon Alexander – who Tom had first met at Dean Junior, and guitarist Kenny Pine. John Hall, who later found fame with Orleans, was a band member for a while. Signed to the Seville label, and distributed by London Records, the first single was titled "*Four Days of Rain*" and the second "*Parade of Uncertainty*." In 1969 Tom recorded a self-titled album with his next band, Euphoria. The line-up consisted of, Roger and Wendy Beckett plus Tom and Sharon. Stylistically intended to be an acoustic folk recording, the label subsequently deleted most of the instrumental contributions by the band members and added strings. Pacheco was utterly disappointed at the end result.

When Euphoria dissolved, Sharon and Tom worked as a duo for a time, mostly around Greenwich Village. While performing at The Gaslight they were approached by an A&R man from CBS who arranged for them to audition for, the *then* label head, Clive Davis. A few weeks later, the pair walked out of New York's CBS building with a record deal. **Pacheco & Alexander** [1971], a twelve-track collection of songs penned by Tom, was produced by John Hall. By this stage, Hall had already recorded his first solo album, which had included three of Tom's songs. [ED. NOTE. The **Pacheco & Alexander** liner credits the songs to Pacheco, while the disc states Pacheco/Alexander. The liner is correct]. Tom and Sharon's album was not a commercial success and the pair drifted apart.

Continuing to ply his trade as a musician, Tom became a solo artist once again and also taught guitar. Occasionally he would tour New England and upstate New York. As for his songs, Jefferson Starship scored a chart hit with "*All Fly Away*," a track taken from their **Dragonfly** [1974] album for RCA. Ronnie Krugel had been part of a duo called The Act, who worked the Greenwich Village clubs and they covered a few Pacheco songs. After moving to the West Coast and joining Marty Balin's band, Bodacious DF, Krugel rang Tom to ask if he could send her some demos. The ten-song voice/guitar tape that Tom made included "*All Fly Away*." After cutting one album for RCA, Balin's group parted ways [ED. NOTE. Krugel was not a band member when the album was recorded]. Months later Paul Kantner rang Tom to confirm that the Starship were going to cover "*All Fly Away*." For their **Red Octopus** [1975] album, Starship recorded "*The Sky Is Full Of Ships Tonight*" and "*I'll Be Here Forever*," but the tracks have never been released. Richie Havens recorded the song "*Indian Prayer*," co-written by Tom and Roland Vargas Mousaa, for his album **Mixed Bag II** [1974].

Pacheco eventually met Kantner on a number of occasions, including one time at an Abby Hoffman Benefit in New York. Tom had written a song about Abby titled "*Hiding Out In America*." Unrecorded, it was only performed during Pacheco's years in Woodstock and Texas. While he was a fugitive, Hoffman used to call

Tom as he loved the album **Swallowed Up....** Bob Fass at WBAI [aka Pacifica Radio] in New York - an alternative culture radio station had given Hoffman a tape of the album. We've jumped ahead a little however.....let's tie up a few loose ends.

Tom was managed by Jacob Solman during the seventies, along with other artists such as Richie Havens and Janis Ian. Ian's early career albums were produced by George Shadow Morton. When Tom signed a recording contract with RCA halfway through the decade, Solman came up with the idea of recording it in Los Angeles, using Morton as the producer. As a means of getting to know one another before beginning work in the studio, Solman determined that the pair should travel west by train – a three-day journey. In the process, Pacheco and Morton became firm friends.

Paul Nelson had tried, and failed, to get Tom a recording deal at Mercury Records. An avid supporter of Pacheco's writing, Nelson then introduced Tom to Stephen Holden, an A&R person at RCA, who later became Music Critic for The New York Times and wrote for Rolling Stone. It was really Nelson who persuaded Stephen and RCA to sign Pacheco. Tom's debut RCA album **Swallowed Up In The Great American Heartland** [1976], with sleeve notes penned by Nelson, included songs about ecology – "*The Tree Song*" and "*This Land Will Roll On*," while the title cut mourned the loss of the *American Dream*. There was also a paean to Tom's hero – "*The Singer*" aka Dylan. Through his lyrics, Tom had painted a portrait of the United States – as he saw it - at that point in time. Some of the material on the second RCA album, **The Outsider** [1976], also produced by Morton, possessed a Texas feel – Tom had begun visiting Austin on an occasional basis. On the same recording, songs such as "*Judge Proctor's Windmill*" and "*The Sky Is Full Of Ships Tonight*" explored the likelihood of visitors from other planets. Intended as a spiritual journey, his sophomore RCA disc opens in the nineteenth century with "*Texas Red*" and closes at some undetermined future date with "*The Sky.....*" By way of expressing concern at the controversial contents of Tom's material, RCA made certain that tracks such as "*Children Of Atlantis*" never made the final pressing. According to Tom there may be as many as ten or twelve unreleased songs from the RCA album sessions in their vaults. Neither album enjoyed commercial success, yet both are gems and prove without doubt that Pacheco is a seer and deep thinker. In the last two years, **Pacheco & Alexander** and **Swallowed Up In The Great American Heartland** have been reissued in Japan on CD.

Frustrated at the censoring of his songs, Tom relocated to Mount Tremper, near Woodstock, after the release of the second RCA album. For the time being, he wanted nothing more to do with the recording industry. Eventually, he put the Tom Pacheco Band together and played New York state roadhouses for a number of years. Although well aware, as far as the recording industry was concerned, that singer/songwriters were out of favour during the late seventies and early eighties Tom continued his prodigious output of songs. As for playing those roadhouses, he has described it as his *blue-collar rock n' roll* period. At one stage, the band's lead guitar player was Shane Fontayne, later a member of Lone Justice. Gary Burke, the drummer, went on to tour with Joe Jackson. The bass player had played for John Prine before joining Tom's band.

In January 1982, Mandy Mercier, an old friend and electric violinist, invited Tom to Austin. Totally unplanned, Texas became his base for the next two years. In Austin he formed another band and worked the clubs as Tom Pacheco and The Hellhounds. The band line-up included Mandy Mercier, George Coyne [lead guitar], Ray Ryan [drums] and a whole series of bass players. In late 1983 Tom was offered a recording deal by a new subsidiary label that CBS were about to launch. With *literally* hundreds of songs composed during his recording hiatus, Pacheco returned to New York full of optimism. He soon discovered that it was a case of *the same old story*. The label refused to include songs on the recording which were liable to court controversy. Needless to say, the recording sessions were abandoned.

Having rented a place in the Catskill Mountains for that winter, and in order to pay his rent Tom put the second version of the Hellhounds together. Two more years of playing Route 28 roadhouses from Albany to Rochester followed, by which time Tom concluded that for too many years his career – as a songwriter and recording artist - had stalled. Concluding that his days as a performing were at an end, he decided that his future lay in songwriting. In the late Spring of 1986 Tom moved to Nashville, Tennessee to pursue the latter aim. Although he did work for a couple of song publishing companies, it didn't take Tom long to realise how dull and mechanical the commercial songwriting process in Nashville was. For an enterprise that survives on a diet of positive, up-tempo songs, principally concerning love, Tom's Vietnam remembrance "*Yellow Ribbons*" or the heartrending "*I Was Meant To Pass Through Your Life*" plainly didn't fit the bill. Tom's Nashville sojourn was a mere sixteen months in duration. On September 23rd 1987, Tom Pacheco arrived in Dublin, Eire.

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Tom Pacheco – One Of America's Greatest Songwriting Treasures - Part II

In last week's episode we followed the early part of Tom Pacheco's career as a musician, a period that included spells in Greenwich Village during the late sixties and through the mid-seventies, and subsequent periods in Woodstock, Austin and Nashville. We closed in the Fall of 1987, when Tom arrived in Dublin, Ireland.

A friend of Tom's, the one time owner of a New York club had relocated to Ireland in the mid-eighties. Informing Tom of the burgeoning music scene that had developed in Dublin, a concert tour was booked. Intended as a six-week visit, Tom became a Dublin resident for the ensuing ten years. Not long after his arrival, Tom was introduced to Clive Hudson, former head of Warner Bros. in Europe. Hudson had just formed his own company, Ringsend Road, which soon became Round Tower Music. Within a matter of months, Clive Hudson became Tom Pacheco's manager, song publisher and record company boss – without a hint of censure relative to the lyrical content of Tom's songs.

Tom's debut album for Round Tower, **Eagle In The Rain** [1989], his first commercially released recording for over a decade, was produced by Arty McGlynn, a stalwart of Van Morrison's road band at the time. His lyrics addressed issues as diverse as gun control - "*Made In America*," the work of Amnesty International - "*You Will Not Be Forgotten*" and a facet of the, by then, major world issue of ecology - "*The Last Blue Whale In The Ocean*." The latter song had been penned in Austin years earlier. New Bedford is featured in Herman Melville's **Moby Dick**, so it's apposite that Pacheco should compose an anti-whaling song. Early March 1990, found him back in his old stomping ground, Austin, for the annual South By South West Music Festival. An old friend, Lucinda Williams, sat in the front row for his showcase at The Cactus Café.

Taken from his album **The Last Waltz** [1990], Daniel O'Donnell, an Irish born and based country singer enjoyed chart single success with Tom's "*Last Waltz Of The Evening*" at the dawn of the new decade. Throughout his career, Pacheco has tended not to record a song [of his] if another artist covers it first. In Nashville, Josie Kuhn an acquaintance from his Greenwich Village days began recording Tom's songs, and also wrote with him. Those collaborations can be found on her Round Tower albums **Paradise** [1992] and **Walks With Lions** [1994], while the Tom Russell album **Box Of Visions** [1993] on the same imprint featured the co-write "*Purgatory Road*." Steinar Albrigtsen, a Norwegian with whom Tom subsequently formed an ongoing performing, recording and co-writing partnership, also recorded his songs. Of the foregoing, Tom enjoyed his greatest and most prolonged success as a writer with the latter performer. The partnership began with Albrigtsen's solo album **Bound To Wander** [1992]. Steinar's *greatest hits* collection **Now And Then** [1998], featured no less than three # 1 Norwegian singles, two that reached # 2 and one # 3 – all penned or co-penned by Tom. We're racing ahead however.....

Tom appeared on the bill at the annual Cambridge Folk Festival in late July 1990, and immediately followed that date with a short British tour. He returned to the islands for another tour in April 1991, was in Germany and Holland the following month, then toured Ireland during June. Late August found him in Norway, and September/October saw him tackle the States once more, followed by another British tour in November/December. The pattern of touring on a regular basis continued into the late nineties.

Tom's second Round Tower album **Sunflowers And Scarecrows** [1991] embraced a wide range of musical styles. Reggae and Tex-Mex were obvious elements, while the heavy prevalence of rock rhythms was somewhat surprising. The original plan had been to record the disc in San Francisco, but the sessions eventually took place at Sonet Studios in London. Fifteen tracks long, it was produced by Kenny Denton, whom Tom had first met at a Woodstock club, Teanies, in 1979. The original plan had been to call the album **Romance And Revolution**. "*Merchant Of Death*" about arms merchants presaged the Iraq/Kuwait conflict, "*Hippy On The Highway*" recalled the loss of innocence and many other facets of life during the late sixties, while "*Van Gogh*" focused on the creative process undertaken by painters, musicians and writers. "*Strange Gods*" contained references to religious cults, child abuse, drugs and numerous other social ills. Tom's conclusion being that each person should find his/her way and not be drawn into bizarre lifestyles. The Waco siege at the Branch Davidian compound was two years in the future.

Not wishing any of his albums to sound the same, **Tales From Red Lake** [1992] was recorded at Jay Vern's [ED. NOTE. aka Vernali] Board Room in Nashville and Tom co-produced the set with Paul A. Speer. The original working title had been **Peaceful Winds**. The front liner picture was the work of that multi-talented, Texas enigma Butch Hancock, and was taken near the legendary venue Gruene Hall. The collection included "*Jessica Brown*" a tale inspired by events in Dallas during November 1963 and "*The Other Side*" a song about death and the journey the *human spirit* may experience following it.

Having recorded a duet album two decades earlier, Tom teamed up with a male partner - Steinar Albrigtsen – for his second attempt. The result was **Big Storm Comin'** [1993]. Cut in Oslo, it was produced by Sverre Erik Henriksen, also the producer of the Norwegian's earlier recordings. Dedicated to the memory of John Lennon, the set produced the # 1 Norwegian single "*Beaches of Rio*" – about the city's street urchins, and a # 2 "*Till I Met You*." The collection also reached # 1 on the Norwegian Album charts. That year the duo touring Norway to SRO notices.

Tom's first album for the Sonet subsidiary of Polygram was titled **Luck Of Angels** [1994]. Returning to Nashville and Jay Vern's studio to cut it, Tom and Jay co-produced the disc. "*Robert And Ramona*" the opening track on **Eagle In The Rain** was re-appraised, and when issued as a single became a Top 5 chart hit for Tom in Norway. Set in the late eighties, "*Searching For The Sixties*" finds a twenty year old - May Annie Kathy – taking to the open road in an attempt to rekindle the two decade old hippie dream of peace and freedom ; while the hardened and hate driven ex-convict in "*Cell Block One*" rediscovers the sanctity of life in an unusual way. Produced by Steinar Albrigtsen and Sverre Erik Henriksen and cut in Oslo, **Bluefields** [1995] was Tom's next solo contribution. Assuming human characteristics, "*Sand*" is a witness recording the evolution of this planet, while "*Red White And Bleeding*" revisits the subject of gun control - or, at least, the lack of it, in America. Tom's message isn't always tinged with doom and gloom. In fact there's a positive air of optimism expressed in "*Blue Montana Sky*." As if hinting at his own state of mind, Tom allowed the restless narrator in the title cut to express a wish for a simpler life.

In the second month of the following year, Tom found himself back in Woodstock recording a disc that he called **Woodstock Winter** [1996]. The winter in Northern New York state was particularly severe that year, but ensconced in Levon Helm's Studio with Jim Weider in charge of the production, like his hero – "*The Singer*" – before him, he cut an album backed by The Band. John Sebastian even dropped in and played some autoharp. All the way from the opening "*Hills Of Woodstock*," through "*Christmas In Times Square*" and "*The Snow Storm*" there was a palpable sense in the lyrics of a restless writer who had finally found some semblance of peace. Tom undoubtedly felt a *tug* while completing the Mercury album in Woodstock. Little more than eighteen months later he became a Woodstock resident, and possibly a *permanent* one, once again.

Just prior to departing from Dublin, in August 1997, late one night Tom entered Dublin's Sun Studios with Pete Holidai. By dawn the following morning, thirty-four songs had been recorded, very much in an *in concert* style featuring Tom's voice and guitar. The resulting 2CD collection, **Bare Bones & Barbed Wire** [1997], was released by the Road Goes On Forever, a label owned and operated by renowned British music journalist, John Tobler. While most of the songs had appeared on Tom's albums from 1989 onward, nine were previously unrecorded. Reinterpretations of "*Robert And Romona*" and "*Jessica Brown*" stood alongside new songs such as, "*Mining Country*" about the death and damage inflicted by land mines. Another new song that pursued an *older* historical theme was "Big Horn, the survey of a once bloody battlefield. Tom returned to his native soil on 23rd September 1997.

The following year, The Band album **Jubilation** [1998] featured two contributions by Tom. "*If I Should Fail*" co-written with Rick Danko and "*High Cotton*," a Pacheco, Danko and Levon Helm collaboration. The front of the liner booklet for **Bare Bones II – The Lost American Songwriter** [1999] featured a painting by Tony Pacheco of Cannon Town, circa 1943. Cannon Town lies near to New Bedford. Rather than record the songs in one sitting, it took three consecutive nights to record the second *bare bones* collection. Jim Weider's guitar augmented a number of the tracks. On this occasion, two thirds of the thirty tracks were previously unreleased songs. The new songs included "*Out of the American Blue*" a portrait of the legendary and late Neal Cassady, while "*John Wilkes Booth*" Tom explored the connection between one of Tom's ancestors and the notorious American assassin. "*China Blue*," the tale of a modern day "Black Beauty" possessed shades of the Robert Redford movie "**The Electric Horseman**." The [Bobby] Kennedy years were re-examined through the eyes of "*Juan Romero*" a busboy, while in "*The Abduction*" alien arrive on Earth, circa 1880, to deliver their own brand of retribution. In the process they save Muddy Waters'

grandfather from a Ku Klux Klan lynching. Now spanning nearly five decades, Tom's imagination as a writer has never been less than fertile. His lyrics have always been honest.

Seven years on from their debut as a duo, Tom and Steinar reunited at Levon Helm's studio in the fall of 1999 to record **Nobodies** [2000]. Co-produced by Scott Petito [a respected engineer/producer of contemporary folk performers], Tom and Steinar, the thirteen song set featured half a dozen tunes co-written by the duo. The remainder composed by Tom, included one of his finest historical songs, the blisteringly critical "*Teddy Roosevelt*." The support musicians included members of the Band, plus *local heroes* Happy Traum, John Sebastian and Jerry Marotta.

The late Rick Danko, who died in December 1999, had an album posthumously released titled **Times Like These** [2000]. It featured their co-write "*You Can Go Home*" - a ballad concerning the plight of refugees, plus Tom's survey of political injustice "*People of Conscience*." Tom played guitar on the sessions. It was planned that the Band would cover more of Tom's output, but following Danko's passing the participants have been somewhat silent. In recent months, Tom has recorded demos of some new material that will appear on his next solo album early in 2002. In addition, Tom is currently striving to have one of his new songs, "*In A World Without America*," written following the events of September 11th, released in the near future as a charity single to benefit famine relief in Afghanistan.

End [1930 words]

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[3740 words]

Discography : **Euphoria** [MGM/Heritage] ; **Pacheco & Alexander** [CBS] ; **Swallowed Up In The Great American Heartland** [RCA] ; **The Outsider** [RCA] ; **Eagle In The Rain** [Round Tower] ; **Sunflowers & Scarecrows** [Round Tower] ; **Tales From The Red Lake** [Round Tower] ; with Steinar Albrigtsen **Big Storm Comin'** [Norsk Gramas] ; **Luck Of Angels** [Sonet] ; **Bluefields** [Sonet/Fjording] ; **Woodstock Winter** [Mercury] ; **Bare Bones & Barbed Wire** [Road Goes On Forever] ; **Bare Bones II – The Lost American Songwriter** [Road Goes On Forever] ; with Steinar Albrigsten **Nobodies** [Norsk Gramas].

Photographs

Caption – Tom P_01

A portrait titled "*Sacred Heart [1995]*" painted by Susan Pacheco Miller, employing a facial likeness of Tom. Susan, his sister, is married to Vern Miller who played bass in Barry and The Remains. Barry being Barry Tashian, formerly of Emmylou's Hot Band who later formed a duo with his wife Holly.

Caption – Tom P_02

I first interviewed Tom in 1990. He told me at that time, "*I'm also a painter. I could do a whole scene with trees and people and flowers. Something like a Grandma Moses type style.*" Here's an example of his work. Photo by Arthur Wood.

Caption – Tom P_03

Tales From The Red Lake, rear liner. Photo by Patty Pacheco Sanders.

Caption – Tom P_04

Nobodies, inner liner photo. Tom Pacheco [left], Steinar Albrigtsen [right]. Photo by Baard Henriksen.