

Buddy Mondlock – The “Everything Waits To Be Noticed” Interview

The Fellowship of the Song - Part I – We write the songs, and find our voice.....

Folkwax reviewed the Art Garfunkel album “Everything Waits To Be Noticed,” produced by Billy Mann, a couple of issues ago. The album also featured the voices of Maia Sharp and Buddy Mondlock, who, in varying combinations with Mann and Garfunkel, penned a significant number of songs on the thirteen-track album. What follows is our mid-December 2002 interview with Buddy Mondlock where he talks in detail about the project. I’d like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to Gary Voorhies of Bob Doyle & Associates for setting up the interview with Buddy.

Obviously Billy Mann was the common link that got this project off the ground. When, where and how had you met Billy.

My manager, Bob Doyle, met Billy Mann in New York one time and was really impressed with him. Bob encouraged Billy to come to Nashville and write. Billy came in like a whirlwind and we wrote something like four songs in four days, which is something I’ve never done before. He had all this great energy, and a really sincere good feeling about making music. That probably happened in 1999.

Who first talked to you about this project.

Eventually Bob started managing Billy’s production career. Billy is a producer as well as a writer. One day Billy had this brainstorm that, somehow, he should get Art and myself together. He thought “*Wouldn’t it be cool do an Art Garfunkel record and get Art involved in the songwriting process.*” Then he thought, “*It shouldn’t be two people, it should be a trio. There should be a woman involved too.*” So he thought of Maia. Billy had written with her in France at Miles Copeland’s castle during one of the regular songwriting retreats they have there. Bob had given me a record of Maia’s about a year before that, just to listen to the production, and I was really impressed with her. When Maia’s name came up, as well as Art’s, I was excited about the whole thing. Eventually Billy got to play this song for Art over the phone that he had written with Graham Lyle [S]. It was called “Bounce.” Art really liked the song and was intrigued by the whole idea. Anyway, Billy convinced him to make a trip to Nashville to meet us.

So the plan was not only to write with Art, but to sing with him on the album as well.

Yeah, I think Billy had that in mind from the very start. As a producer he was thinking about our individual voices, and he had this idea that they would blend well together. I have kind of a breathy voice. Sure enough, the first time the three of us sat down to sing together, it seemed like my voice merged with Art’s. They kind of feathered in. Maia is such a flexible singer, she started putting these beautiful harmonies over the top of what Artie and I was doing. The first one we sang together was “Perfect Moment.” Maia’s harmonies started to weave around where Artie and I were singing. The way “Perfect Moment” happened was Billy told me Art had written a book of poems called “**Still Water.**” A friend of mine had a used bookstore and found it on the web for me. Billy encouraged me to pick one of the poems and use it as a starting place for a song, so that I would have something to play for Art when we first met. I got together with Pierce Pettis and we wrote a song based upon lines from one of Art’s poem.

How did you feel personally when you began work on the project. Overawed by the immensity of it.

Well, I wasn’t sure what to expect. I’d never met Art but I’d been listening to him all my life. To be honest, the way Art sings probably influenced the way I sing. Here, I was going to meet him and possibly work with him. It was a little intimidating to be sure. He turned out to be very, very gracious and excited about the whole thing - really fun to work with and creative. A little quirky, in a good way. From the songwriting perspective too, he jumped in with both feet. He didn’t hang back and let Maia and I do the work. He was a full partner right from the beginning, even though writing songs was a very new thing for him.

What attracted you to his poems.

There was a lot of imagery in them. As a writer I’m attracted to imagery. When I’m writing a song, I try to find through images a sensual involvement in what’s going on in the story. Early on I felt, “*This could really work. There’s a lot of good stuff here that can be mined for songs.*”

So how did the actual writing process work.

Maia and Art came too Nashville. I had "Perfect Moment" ready and I played it for everybody. He liked the song and we started singing it together. Maia plays the sax and she started putting this beautiful sax line on it, and then the harmonies started to come in. Even on that first day, there was all this cool stuff going on musically with us, not just the writing part. The next day, I think Art and Billy and I sat down and wrote "Wishbone." Billy said *"Why don't we have Maia sing lead on "Wishbone." Then Art and her sing in unison on parts of it."* Billy was right in there from the beginning, directing musically how things were sounding, and directing the songwriting too. Making sure everybody was communicating, and that everybody was comfortable.

How long did that first stage in Nashville last.

It was about five or six days. Once we worked out our vocal arrangements for "Wishbone," "Bounce" and "Perfect Moment," we went into the studio. It was Billy's idea to record songs right away and we used Nashville players. It was just meant to be a demo, but we ended up using those tracks as the album cuts.

What was the next phase relative to writing the songs. Did everyone spend some time in New York.

We got together in everybody's hometown, at least once. The next one was in New York. Billy had a loft apartment down by the South Street seaport, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. He was going to be gone actually, but he made it available for Maia and me, so we stayed there. Of course Art lives in New York. At those sessions we wrote "The Thread."

You were certainly in the right town.

Yeah. There are plenty of New York locations in that lyric. That one took a couple of days, and then we found that poem that's got the line *"twenty eight geese in sudden flight."*

"Everything Waits To Be Noticed."

That was really fun to write because the poem had the basic idea there already. We just started free-associating what other things wait to be noticed by throwing ideas up into the air and making lists and stuff. That was really fun to write that song.

Did you do any recording in New York

We found a studio and just with my acoustic guitar, Maia's sax and the three of us singing, we recorded those two new songs. We started in the middle of the day and figured *"We'll sing the songs and it's going to be acoustic, it'll be easy and we'll be done by dinner."* I think we all said goodbye to each other about four in the morning.

Presumably there was a writing session in Los Angeles.

Later on we met out in LA, on Maia's turf. L.A. would have been in the summer time. I think there was another Nashville trip in between there. We met in L.A. with the idea of writing a new song, and also working out arrangements to "The Kid" and "Another Only One." "Another Only One" is a song that Maia had written previously that Art had been listening to and really liked. I did too.

My understanding is that "How Did You Know" was written during the L.A. session.

"How Did You Know" was written during the second Nashville session. It was Maia, Art and Billy who wrote that one. "Turn, Don't Turn Away" was written then, and that was me and Art and Billy.

It sounds as if there were four writing sessions, so that must have pretty well filled the year 2000.

The record came out in October of 2002. Gosh, maybe I've got this a little wrong. The last time we got together to write was in the summer time, and that would have been 2001. I think these sessions were stretched out over a year and half. We started recording the record on September 10th 2001, and had this great first day in the studio.

Was it always part of the project to include songs by other writers.

Not necessarily. As the project was moving on, we concentrated on writing together, or finding songs that either Billy or Maia or I had written previously. As we got closer to making the record Billy said, *"Let's take a minute and everybody look outside their own catalogue. Let's find a couple of songs that we all love. We don't*

necessarily have to record them.” I was telling Carol [#] about this and she said “You know some of the best songwriters around, are in your record collection.” I made a compilation disc of songs by Tom Prasado-Rao, Lisa Aschmann, Tom Kimmel, Richard Julian and others. I thought Lisa and Tom’s “What I Love About Rain” was a really beautiful song with a soaring chorus. As for Richard Julian, I always liked his song “Young And Free.” It reminded me of Art’s earlier work, in some ways. When word got out in Nashville that we were looking for outside material, people wanted to pitch me stuff. I’d hear a song halfway through and I’d realise – “Oh my God, I’m going to stop it before the song is over. I hate when they do that to me.” It was really kind of an uncomfortable situation for me, to be on the other side of that equation.

I don’t suppose that it was a hard job to convince Art to record “The Kid” since it had been covered already.

I didn’t try and convince him at all, Art just picked that one out. Billy had given him all my records, and Art was just attracted to that song from very early on I think.

What I’m talking about is the covers by Peter, Paul & Mary, and Cry 3. The song has a considerable history. Good songs get covered Buddy, just listen to what I’m saying to you.

[Laughs]. Thank you very much, I appreciate that. That song, of all the songs I’ve written is probably – that’s probably the one that seems to, most consistently hit a chord with people. People seem to be able to relate to that song. I was really writing it about myself, but I think there is a lot of people out there who – maybe it’s partly the times we live in – you’re a dreamer, but it’s not always possible for those dreams to come true in the way that you picture them.

How come “Every Now And Then” got picked.

Bob Doyle was the one who threw that one into the mix. Bob always has liked that song and, of course, since I’m one of the writers on it along with Garth [Brooks], it just seemed logical to consider it anyway. Originally we were trying to limit it to twelve songs, but we were having a hard time narrowing things down. When we recorded “Every Now And Then,” in the interests of simplicity, we decided to record it only with our three voices, without any doubling of parts. It came out pretty cool.

To be continued.

Note.

[\$] Circa 1975 Garfunkel cut a song composed by Graham Lyle and Benny Gallagher [both Scots by birth] titled “Breakaway,” and it subsequently became the title of the album.

[#] Buddy’s wife and fellow musician/songwriter, Carol Elliott.

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 12/02 & 01/03.

[1995 words]

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The Fellowship of the Song - Part II – We record the album, find a label and take to the road....

Last week we looked at how songwriter/performer/producer, Billy Mann, came up with a plan for Art Garfunkel to become a songwriter. Enlisting the help of acquaintances/song-smiths, Maia Sharp and Buddy Mondlock, songs were composed during week-long writing sessions in Nashville, New York and Los Angeles. On September 10th 2001 the recording sessions for the album “Everything Waits To Be Noticed” began.

Did you only use one recording studio in Nashville.

Omni Sound was where we recorded the album.

You said earlier that you began recording the album on September 10th 2001.

As I said, we had this amazing first day in the studio. We got more stuff on tape than we expected to. The next day we woke up and the World Trade Centre was on fire. Our whole world had changed, basically. Carol [#] and I were glued to the television set. This was about nine in the morning. After an hour or so – usually we met at the studio at 10.00am - I called Billy. I wanted to see how his wife was doing, as Billy had just got married. Their apartment was down on the lower tip of Manhattan. She was OK, although she had jogged around the World Trade Centre earlier that morning. Then I said “Billy, I guess we’re not going into the studio today.” He said “Oh no, we are going in. We are not going to let these guys control us. There’s nothing that we can do from here, right now. Maybe the best thing we can do is make music. That’s what we do – and put some good feeling out into the world.” That’s what we did. Everybody came in. It was a bit of a late start, of course, but the musicians all showed up. It was kind of a tough day, and I think “The Kid” was what we recorded. In the lounge, outside the booth, everybody was following events on tv as they unfolded.

How long did the recording process take.

It was about two and a half weeks altogether.

Considering the fact that Simon & Garfunkel was a male duo, was there a conscious attempt, vocally, not to sound like Simon & Garfunkel on the recording you were making. Obviously half the old vocal equation was there. I accept that there were three voices, and one was female.

I think there really wasn’t. We really weren’t thinking about that stuff as we were recording and working out those arrangements. We were just thinking about how the three of us best worked together, and what sounded the best. What our tastes were. What felt right to us. We weren’t really that conscious of what had gone before.

How do you perceive Billy Mann’s contribution to all aspects of the project.

Billy is a great facilitator and had the big picture, I think, right from the beginning. He was good at making it happen and sort of finessing everybody into the direction that would bring us to this final point, where we made this record together. Bringing things out of us that maybe we didn’t necessarily know we had in us. For instance on “Perfect Moment” which is the first thing we sang together, Artie and I sang in unison on that song, which excited me, because I was hoping we’d get to do some of that. I felt like it would work. Then the first chorus came along and he said to Maia “OK, I want you to sing harmony on this, but I want it to be the part underneath them.” She’s like “What, I can’t sing lower than them. I can’t get down there.” He goes “I think you can. I think you’ve got that part of your range. It’s going to sound different – it will be a little smokier – but try it.” Sure enough it worked, and she sounds great down there. He was drawing things out of us, and making sure we were making everything we could of this combination of people and the talents and strengths we each possessed. Billy is also really, really musical. He helped us with a lot of the vocal arrangements and was totally hands on. Even when we were in the studio and one of us would be out in the booth, he’d say “Alright, try singing this counter part here.” We’d do it and just follow Billy’s direction on some of these songs, as we were recording them. In a way, he was conducting, but conducting voices instead of instruments.

Maia, Billy and you played on the album, making a grand total of eleven session players. Obviously I’m not counting the nine string players in that total. It seemed to me to be a pretty tight little musical unit musically. Were they people you knew, or Billy knew.

The very first time we got together, Billy had not met a lot of those guys. Lana Thrasher who was running the publishing company here then, and also producing the demo sessions at Major Bob Publishing, suggested to

Billy which players to use. I had a few ideas too – but Lana put that first band together that ended up playing on “Perfect Moment.” Pretty much, we stayed consistent with that first group of players. Artie was amazed that these guys could come in, not even having heard these songs in some cases, and an hour later be playing these wonderful, amazing arrangements. Arrangements that we invented in the studio.

Were there any songs recorded that didn't make it on to the album.

In the studio we thought, “*We'll probably use twelve out of the thirteen songs that we've recorded.*” We got done and really could not find one to eliminate. It was a little painful thinking that we had to get rid of one of them. Nobody could come up with one where they thought, “*If one has to go, maybe it should be this one.*” Nobody could agree, which is really a good sign. All the tracks we recorded were included on the album.

Once the Fall 2001 sessions were complete, how did you feel.

We were very proud of what we had accomplished. It started out as an idea in Billy's head, and then he got us together. We started writing and singing together, and doing these little demo sessions here and there. We were encouraged from the very beginning, but it's a long road from writing songs and singing them together to actually making a record. It was really a great feeling of satisfaction when we finally got it all done and mixed. Of course George Messenburg has amazing ears, so it was great to be able to have him, kind of, overseeing the mixing and putting things all together and making them sound as good as they could.

When the album was finally recorded, did you pinch yourself just as a reality check.

[Laughs]. Well we had been living with it pretty solidly by that time. There was a little bit of a sigh and “*Phew. Boy, we did it.*” I think there was a moment too, when I put the final mixes on and listened to it all the way through and thought “*This is really cool. I can't believe we've done this.*”

My understanding is that initially the album was going to be released by Atlantic Records.

Yeah. The original deal was with Atlantic – with Division One, I think it was called. It was a subsidiary label and they paid for making the record. Right after we finished it and turned it in, Atlantic had a corporate reshuffle and Division One was one of the casualties. The guy's who had signed our project and were the ones who were shepherding it along, and were enthusiastic about it, were gone. WEA owned the recording, but nobody was championing it for us anymore.

There was nobody at WEA who would listen to it.

I know that the head of the company – Billy knew him, and he really liked the record, but he can't necessarily dictate that they release the record. I mean I suppose he could. Their Marketing people were scratching their heads too, so it kind of sat around for a while –

How did EMI/Manhattan come into the picture.

We realised that Atlantic probably wasn't going to release the record. I think they said that they would, but everybody knew that if we pressed them to do it, they would just kind of throw it out there - and it never would really get worked. It would just -

Die.

Die in the doldrums. Nobody wanted that to happen. Billy and Bob and Art's management all kept their ears pricked. They started playing it for people, to see if we could generate some interest from another label. I'm not sure who got in touch with Manhattan first. It was probably Art's management company, but Manhattan really seemed to get it. After finishing the album, I'd put all my stuff on hold, thinking the record was going to come out by February 2002 at the latest. Carol and I were heading out on vacation and checked our messages – there was a call from Gary in our office saying “*Can you be in New York in three weeks, because they need you for a photo shoot. The record is on again. We got a new label and they want to try and get it out this Fall.*” After all that waiting, it was “*Hurry up and let's make this happen now.*” And it all came together.

As I understand it, you've played some Stateside dates. How were the shows received.

Very enthusiastically. We've been getting very positive live reviews and the record has been getting great reviews. I think people really appreciate the flow of the show. We played in Chicago, my hometown, and about

forty of my family members were there [Laughs]. I really did feel kind of nervous when I walked out on the stage. Of course it was a fun night.

Like a homecoming.

Well, I got to play at The Park West Theatre, which is this venue, where I've seen so many great acts perform. I saw Richard Thompson there. K.D Lang. Michael Hedges. All these great shows that I'd seen there –

When you were a youngster.

Yeah. It was fun to get to walk out on that stage, and it was a big night for me. I got together with everybody after the show and one of the comments I heard from people was that they really liked the whole flow of the show. The way we've been doing it is that I start the show with a short set of three songs. Then Maia comes out and does three or four songs with a bass player and drummer. At the end of her set she'll call me and Art back on, and we do "Everything Waits To Be Noticed," as the introduction of the sound of the three of us singing together. I play guitar and the three of us sing. Then there's a little break. Art comes back with a whole band and does some of older numbers from his solo career, plus Simon & Garfunkel stuff. Then Maia and I come back out and we do four or five songs from the trio record. Art does some of his older material to end the evening, and then for the encores Maia and I come back out. Actually we kind of drift on and off during the show, and sometimes we are just playing instruments. Maia plays a sax solo on "Heart Of New York" and that kind of thing. What the audience was getting was sort of an overview of Art's career and a pretty healthy dose of the new stuff too. By the end of the tour we were performing six or seven of the new songs.

*Unlike Tolkien's masterpiece there is no Part III.....
we may however review the live show at some future date.*

Note.

[#] Buddy's wife and fellow musician/songwriter, Carol Elliott.

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