

Five Decades Of Friendship With Jack And Steve

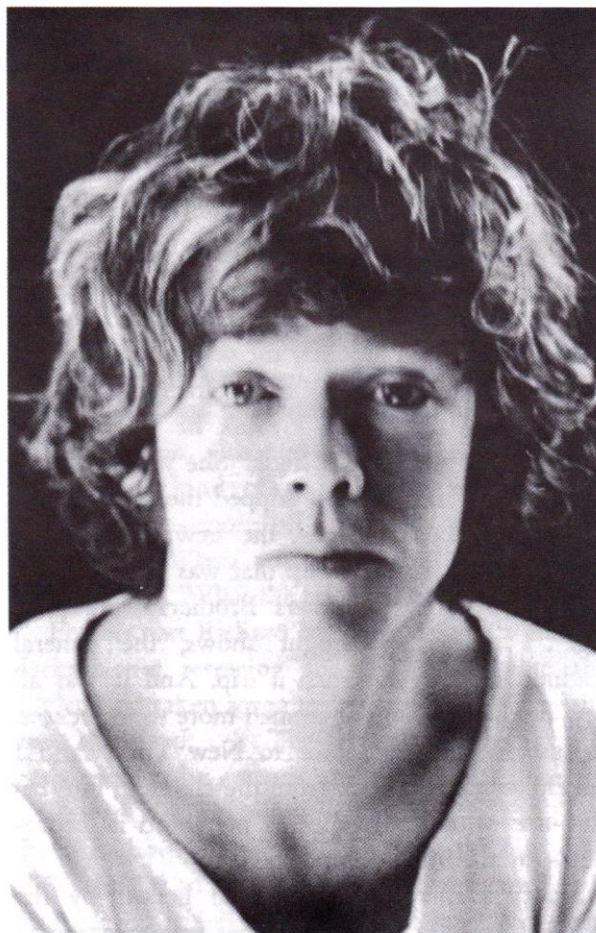
Greg Copeland has penned and co-penned songs during three clearly definable periods in his life. That said, you can't divorce the presence and influence of schoolyard friends Jack and Steve in his life story. If the latter is the synopsis, what ensues is close to the full monty ...

Gregory Copeland, Steven Noonan and Jack Browne (the latter was a couple of years younger, and eventually adopted the Christian name Jackson) were acquaintances during the early 1960s while attending Sunny Hills High School in Fullerton, California. In the schoolyard hierarchy Noonan was the acknowledged musician and rebel student ringleader, while according to the second chapter of Rich Wiseman's 1982 biography Jackson Browne: The Story Of A Hold Out, academically speaking, Copeland was the: 'star debater, student body officer, student extraordinaire, most-likely-to-succeed candidate, and campus sosh.' Tuning in and dropping out, call it what you will, in late 1963 Copeland and Noonan connected via the latter's music. In a recent interview with Jacques-Eric Legarde of the French music publication Xroads, Copeland recalled the first occasion he heard Noonan playing guitar: 'Before that moment I had no desire at all to write songs, but Noonan changed all that.'

Moving on to perform folk songs of the day together during school breaks, Copeland was soon wedding his words to Noonan's melodies. The pair attended a local Joan Baez concert where Dylan made a surprise appearance, and fired up by what they heard, in school the following day they 'spread the word' among acquaintances willing to listen. Young Jack did. Having observed the Minnesota minstrel perform, allied to rampant student political awareness and action, coupled with the rise and rise of the civil rights movement, the duo could not fail to be inspired. Wiseman claims their first composition was *The Ballad Of Rosa Parks*. The late Rosa Parks' refusal to relinquish her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery,

Alabama bus on December 1, 1955 propelled civil rights to the forefront of America's collective consciousness ... and conscience.

Noonan and Copeland graduated high school in 1964, and the former went on to attend Fullerton Junior College and perform on the local club circuit, while the latter headed north enrolling as a literature major at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University). That summer Steve's father, Alan, opened a coffeehouse in Long Beach—seventeen miles from Fullerton—



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named Aware. The high school graduates apart, Browne and other musician friends began hanging out at the venue. It was there that Jackson met similarly minded Long Beach pickers Jeff Hanna, Bruce Kunkel and Jimmie Fadden. The latter trio formed the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band a few years later, and for a short time Browne was a member.

The band's debut single Copeland/Noonan's *Buy For Me The Rain* climbed to the lower reaches of the US top 50 and subsequently opened the self-titled album which Liberty Records issued during March 1967. Copeland/Noonan's *Tide Of Love* appeared on the band's 1967 sophomore collection RICOCHET.

Recorded during October 1966 in Los Angeles and January 1967 in New York City, the famed Nina Music Demos featured ten songs performed by Noonan—nine of which Greg co-wrote—and thirty songs by Browne.

Nina was Elektra Records song publishing arm, and Steve signed a recording contract with the label soon afterwards. Recorded in New York, where concurrently he worked for Vista (America's domestic Peace Corps), Noonan attested in the liner notes to the 2005 Collectors' Choice CD reissue of STEVE NOONAN. that the sessions were fraught with interruptions and production disagreements. That said, Elektra issued the eleven-song recording during 1968 but it failed to sell in significant numbers. The collection was composed of five Noonan/Copeland collaborations, one penned by Noonan, four by Browne—that he has never recorded—and closed with the Noonan/Browne co-write *Trusting Is A Harder Thing*.

The daughter of musicians, Pamela Pollard grew up in the San Fernando Valley. Having met like-minded musician Rick Stanley, the pair formed the Gentle Soul and recorded a Terry Melcher produced album for CBS/Epic Records. The album surfaced in late 1968, by which time the band had disintegrated. Following Pamela's March 1968

marriage to Greg Copeland, the happy couple left for an extended sojourn in Europe. An eleven-song collection THE GENTLE SOUL included Pollard's *See My Love (Song For Greg)*. In fact CBS had issued two non-album singles during 1967, and the B-side of their second outing was Pollard/Copeland's *Song For Three*. The 1967 self-titled debut album

by Elektra band, Clear Light, which featured Crosby Stills & Nash/Manassas drummer Dallas Taylor, included Copeland/Noonan's *Street Singer*. Noonan and Pollard weren't Greg's only collaborators. Contracted to Nina Music as a songwriter, when Elektra brought Ars Nova—formed by New York City's Mannes College Of Music students—to Los Angeles to record an album, Greg and the group's principal composer Wyatt Day (guitar, keyboard, vocals) produced four songs for the band's 1968 self-titled debut. Released the following year by Atlantic Records, the band's sophomore album *SUNSHINE & SHADOWS*, featured one Day/Copeland co-write.

During late 1966 Browne occasionally worked as support guitarist for Velvet Underground vocalist Nico, when she performed solo at Stanley's, the basement room of the St. Mark's, New York City venue Balloon Farm. Her legendary 1967 solo debut *CHELSEA GIRL* opened with Browne/Copeland's *The Fairest Of The Seasons*—her rendition resurfaced on 2001's *THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS* soundtrack. *CHELSEA GIRL* also included two Browne penned originals, and he contributed guitar to five of the ten tracks. In the aforementioned Xroads interview, Copeland commented: 'I didn't really write many songs between high school days and the early 80s.' Before laying Greg & Co's late 1960s musical exploits to rest, let me just add that Browne's Nina Demos performances included *Gotta See A Man About A Daydream* (Browne/Copeland) and *Time Travel Fantasy* (Browne/Pollard).

Pamela and Greg eventually went their separate ways, and Copeland spent much of the 1970s alternating between periods of work and travel. Those 'far flung' sojourns began the previous decade. Planning on reaching India, Greg was in Istanbul, Turkey with the late Adam Saylor (memorialised in Browne's *Song For Adam*) when the Six Day War began. The borders closed, the pair retreated to Milos in Greece where Greg received his draft notice and returned home. Late in the 1970s Greg returned to university and studied English and American poetry, followed by a spell in graduate school. His studies complete Copeland's thoughts turned once again to songwriting, this time featuring his own words and music. There was however a precondition, as he related to Legarde: 'I have a really hard time

singing if the song isn't about something that comes straight out of my spine. I figured that if I could actually sing it out loud, it was probably the truth (at least for me); and if I couldn't bring myself to sing it, it was probably something less than that.' Copeland committed a cappella renditions of his songs to tape, and passed a copy to Jackson Browne. Browne released his debut album in 1972, a self-titled collection on Asylum Records. David Geffen, Browne's manager, founded the label with his business partner Elliot Roberts in order that his client's music had an outlet. Geffen stepped down from Asylum midway through the decade due to health issues. By 1980 Warner Brothers, Elektra and Asylum Records had merged, and his health restored

I fondly remember *REVENGE WILL COME* surfacing like a beam of 'white light' in a time when many singer-songwriters were struggling to make a living. Copeland's lyrics were full of '[punk] piss and vinegar,' climaxing in the penultimate cut *El Salvador*, which exposed the shenanigans of President Reagan and his backroom boys. And who, upon first hearing it, will forget the title track lead guitar riff. Critically lauded, when the album failed to shift by the proverbial skip load (and it thoroughly deserved to), Copeland concluded that tilting at windmills was fine and dandy but feeding his new wife and young sons had to be *THE* priority. For nearly two decades Greg found employment, initially as a paralegal then as a lawyer. Then came the third

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Geffen persuaded the conglomerate to fund a new label, Geffen Records. Concurrently Browne was releasing his sixth Asylum album, and like its immediate predecessors it proved to be a multi-platinum seller. With his stock in the ascendancy, Browne persuaded his old label head to sign his old friend to the new imprint.

Browne recruited some of his 1980 *HOLD OUT* team, including co-producer Greg Ladanyi. Assisted by Dennis Kirk, the latter fulfilled the role of engineer on Copeland's debut album *REVENGE WILL COME*, while Jackson helmed the project and also played guitar. Bob Glaub (bass) and Danny 'Kootch' Kortchmar (guitar, percussion, maracas) from Jackson's studio band, were augmented by Ian Wallace (drums), Rick Vito (guitar), Jim Ehinger (piano, organ) and, on two cuts, Little Feat's Billy Payne (keyboards). Copeland rehearsed with the band for one day, and then recording began in earnest. Doubtless with a twinkle in his eye, he recently recalled: 'I pretty much just showed up and sang.' Released in 1982, the ten-song album was pitched into a market where disco was edging out punk music as the prominent genre. Where *HOLD OUT* reached number one on the US Album Chart, Browne's only recording to do so; sadly, Copeland's album sank without trace.

millennium ...

Between 1983 and 2003 Copeland's pen lay dormant, then, at the outset of this century, a friend enquired why he wasn't writing. While 'the juices' didn't flow instantly, the urge to create eventually kicked in. Midway through 2003, Greg was leaving one post and starting another. Between jobs for one hundred days, tinkering turned to merging word and melody. Each time a song was completed, Greg took his four-track demo tape to Steve Noonan's home studio for 'dressing up.' Then history repeated itself. Jackson heard Greg's new batch of tunes and introduced his old friend to Greg Leisz, a Californian musician/producer with a thoroughbred pedigree. Copeland told Legarde that Leisz became: '...the real godfather of the record. As a producer, Leisz is right there with T-Bone Burnett and Joe Henry in terms of finding the real essence of a song.' Taking a couple years to reach fruition, twenty-six years on, on a couple of *DIANA AND JAMES* cuts, for Bob Glaub it proved to be a return engagement. The album was released in the States by Browne's Inside Recordings late last year, and in Europe early in the new one. Buy it, gems are rare. *HOPEFULLY DIANA AND JAMES, ACT II* won't take another quarter of a century to arrive... **AW**