

UNFINISHED BUSINESS - BEK Notes

December 2004

The Concept

I started this project in 2002, shortly after the untimely death of a work associate. These events are connected in that he was diagnosed with leukemia and subsequently passed away within 6 months. After his memorial services, my wife asked me what "unfinished business" I'd most regret if I were to find myself in such a situation. One of those regrets would be that there were never-completed songs, partial lyrics, snippets of guitar lines, etc. that had been rummaging through my head for 30 years or more, and for one reason or another, in most cases I'd never so much as written them down. Thus the concept for **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**.

The criterion for inclusion was that the song had to have been left in limbo status, either by virtue of having been unsatisfactorily arranged in the past (as in "McClure's"), poorly recorded (as in "No Disgrace", "Hey Lou", "The Light", and "Darlin' Why"), guitar lines without words (as in "Sleeping", "Bad Habit", "Promise", and "Unfinished Business"), or songs that were just never recorded at all ("Right On Time"). One song ("Singing Wood") is the result of an idea I've pondered since college days, about two people who meet on an astral plane or alternate reality; it has finally made it as a song! Another ("Fade to Green") was just a loose idea built around a simple melodic line that I've used as a warm-up exercise for some time.

Tech-Talk

Everything was recorded at Red Hen (my "home studio", aptly named after the story of the Little Red Hen, who didn't get any help when she wanted to bake bread, but got plenty of help eating the bread! a perfect analogy for the DIY recordist). The tracks were mastered by Mark Stein at Shoreline Digital Mastering in Mill Valley, California.

The equipment used for the source tracks was a Roland VS1880 24-bit integrated digital audio recording system.

Outboard gear included:

- Emu Proteus – for keyboard sounds
- Dbx 263x – De-esser
- Aphex 107 Tubessence – microphone pre-amp
- Alesis 3630 compressor/limiter
- Mesa Formula Pro guitar pre-amp
- SansAmp PSA-1 guitar pre-amp
- Alembic F-1X bass guitar pre-amp
- Roland Human Rhythm Composer drum synth

Mics included:

- Audio Technica AT33a, AT4033, AT3035
- Shure SM81
- AKG 414 BULS

Guitars used include:

- 1979 Martin D-25
- 2001 Taylor 12-string
- 1998 National Steel
- 1963 Epiphone Riviera
- 1965 Gibson SG Special
- 1982 "hybrid" telecaster-style
- 2003 West Coast Steel Guitar/Warmouth telecaster-style
- 1990 PRS EG4 "Bolt on"
- 1998 Alembic Epic Bass
- 1972 Fender Jazz Bass
- 1995 Hamer Studio Artist

Helping Hands From...

My old friend Bob Littleton

(<http://www.pedalsteel.com/westcoaststeel/products.html>)

provided the tasty pedal steel guitar break on RIGHT ON TIME, but he also kept my guitars in working order throughout this project. Jeff Rader, another old friend did the artwork for this album and my first album, MEGATON MELODIES

(<http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/kilcourse>). Bill Heydolph of Front Porch CD (<http://www.frontporchcd.com/>) did the final production, and was very supportive besides.

The Songs

No Disgrace: written about 1976. This is an autobiographical sketch about meeting my wife. I haven't written a truly autobiographical piece in years, preferring to project imaginary situations in my songs. But this one accurately portrays exactly what was going on in our life in 1976.

The Singing Wood: written in 2003. This song is one I'd always wanted to write, inspired by a short story I'd read while in college (1969 or 1970) about two people who meet in an alternate reality every night for their whole lives. They finally meet "in the flesh" as old people in a rest home, and realize that their dreams were real. This idea always fascinated me, and I've carried it around for 30+ years before finally putting it to words and music!

McClure's: written in 1970, this song was recorded by Mistress in 1973, but I never liked a couple of the phrases in the original lyrics, and so changed them (writer's license!). Also, this version is more "muscular" than the Mistress version, which I came to think of as a little too laid back, not enough rock'n'roll. However,

this version holds true to the Mistress arrangement structurally. The song was about some kind of transcendental experience I had one solitary day at McClure's Beach near Point Reyes, California, sometime in 1970. I went back to my place that same night, and wrote the song in one sitting. Originally, this song was a churning rocker, ala Small Faces, but by the time Mistress did it, it had turned into a sort of "hippie" ballad. This version gets it a little closer to its roots.

Sleeping With The Light On: written in 2003. This song is based on the guitar line, sort of a Country Western lick rummaging in my head for awhile. The song itself morphed from an idea to make a song about very adult anxiety attacks sound like a children's lullaby (monsters in the closet!).

Darlin' Why: written round 1979 or '80. For a long time I thought this was the best "total" song I'd ever written, kind of my own "Yesterday". This arrangement is exactly as I've played it for years, right down to the synth growl at the beginning. I'd always been afraid of recording it for fear of screwing it up, but it's finally made it to the list!

Hey Lou: written in 1978. Another truly autobiographical song, written about the same time as NO DISGRACE, and much the same subject.

Promise Of Spring: written in 2004. I'd had it in my mind to write a tune about baseball, losing the season, and hoping for better things next year ("hope springs eternal"!) for a long time. The song is built around the dreamy major/minor transition, again, a musical idea I've had for awhile. I could never come up with a second verse (the first one captures the sentiment perfectly), and so I decided to let the guitar do the talking. The final section tried to state with a guitar all the frustration associated with watching your team blow it in the post-season.

Bad Habit: written in 2002. This song is about someone who's truly addicted to something or someone in a very destructive

way, but can't admit it and can't stop. The song is built around two different progressions (the opening chordal progression, and the acoustic riff) that I had hoped to turn into tunes. They were joined in this song when I wrote the lyrics.

The Light: written about 1975 or '76. This is a very simple song about being saved by love. I never recorded it because a friend back then thought it was about "finding Jesus" (it definitely isn't!), and I didn't want anyone to come to that conclusion again. At this point in time, any interpretation is fine with me!

Right On Time: written about 1983. I was playing in a country/western band (Don Myers & Proud Country), and was playing a cassette tape of some original songs to Don, the bandleader. He asked me, "that stuff's okay, but why don't you write a country song?". So I did, and this is it. It's based on a conversation I had on a plane with another passenger; I asked him what he did for a living, and he told me he worked on an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. When he mentioned that he was married, I commented that the life style had to be tough on his wife, but he replied, "she's gonna get her fair share when I get home tonight"—a perfect line for a country song! It's virtually unchanged from the original concept, only adding the great pedal steel break by my longtime friend and bandmate, Bob Littleton.

Fade To Green: written 2003. This instrumental is my tribute to Peter Green, the legendary guitarist of the original Fleetwood Mac. I've always regarded Green as the greatest of 60's-era British blues players, and still listen to those old Fleetwood Mac recordings for inspiration. In my gigging days with Mistress, I felt that guitarist Greg Douglass had a distinctively "Green" sound to his playing (I'm not sure he ever agreed); both guitarists used surprisingly "clean" guitar tones, contrary to the notion that distortion makes the sound. I tried to capture the tones and some of the feel of those times in this song, although I certainly can't play anything like Peter !

Unfinished Business: written in 2004. This song started with the ascending guitar line, something I've had in my bag for a long time (I think since I taught finger-picking guitar in the late 60's!). The idea is to present a kind of sonic "final bow"; I tried (and almost -but not quite- succeeded) to re-introduce every instrument I used in the prior eleven songs. I got the idea after seeing a "folk" concert where in the end all the performers join in for one last song. The words were written after the track was otherwise complete- the idea is that "putting our backs into the job" is more about sharing a vision with others than about the results of the labor per se.