



BOSTON PETER PARCEK BLUES

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US bluesman Peter Parcek has been kicking up a storm recently. Now with a new album just out, he found time to bring us up to date on his musical journey and thinking.

Hi Peter! I loved the new album. We were lucky to get it after your accident with your wrist.

Yeah, I was putting the garbage out in the ice last February. My wife said I didn't need to, it's slippery. I said 'I'm a cat, I'll land.' I took one step and I fell. It still hurt 5 months later and I was playing gigs and playing through the pain. I saw a specialist and was in a brace for almost 2 months. It was one of the biggest challenges; not touching a guitar. Against some odds it healed and it was a case of building it back, slowly. But it's OK again now.

I'm so pleased it is, both for you and for blues fans. It's great to get the album from you! The opening track sounds like a lament for the situation we're in.

That track separates people out. I've literally lost friends over that track! Polarised doesn't do it justice. It's like we're in different countries. It's frightening, there's a degree of separation that in my lifetime, I just haven't seen. You know, I lived through the sixties, which was profound, but there's just a way in which the citizens are just not being taken care of and not being represented. We've lost over 210,000 citizens to the Corona virus and that's just one issue. But I don't think that's just a US issue. The song is a reworking of Rollin' & Tumblin'. I guess there's a ferocity about it and the music matches.

And the guitars?

I think there were three on that one. The slide was a 50's Harmony Stratotone (I own that one myself). Basically, it looks like an ironing

board with strings! It's so small, yet so powerful. The neck is huge. There's nothing else I have that sounds like that. Then I borrowed a '61 Stratocaster from a friend, which I've been trying to buy, but he'll never sell it. And I believe there's also a Tele Junior on there, which I used for the power chords.

Buddy Guy once praised your playing by saying it was "As bad as EC"

Yes, that was an incredible compliment and I adore EC. This came about at a club called Nightstage, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where I went to see Buddy Guy and Junior Wells. I sat at a table with people who were following the tour and they invited me backstage during the interval. I hadn't formally met Buddy and did something I wouldn't ever normally dream of doing. I picked up his white ESP Stratocaster and sat playing, obviously unplugged. (If I'd thought about it more, I would NOT have touched that guitar.) I just happened to look up and Buddy, across the room, had his finger to his lips and he was really listening and he looked at me and I looked at him and he said that thing. I said, 'Well, I stole everything I know from you.' and he smiled.

And the next track, Everybody Oughta Make A Change, you've given it a Peter Green treatment?

Exactly, I've always loved those lyrics. I actually thought I was going to do it acoustically and I was doing it more in a sort of John Estes vein and just one day happened to plug in and stumbled across the setting and was going for that spiritual, ethereal quality that Peter had. He paved the way for that style. I was lucky that I lived in London. This was during the Vietnam war and my dad was a marine and my mom had been in the Navy, so it was a military household and yet I was a conscientious

objector, not wishing to participate in war. You can imagine that that was unusual at the time and even more unusual in my household. It caused tremendous friction with my dad, he was very hard-line. My mom wasn't sure the war was defensible and she had a friend whose husband had offices in the UK and in France, with an apartment in London and she said you can stay there.

I had just got out of High School and when I got to London, it was still the Blues Boom and I got to see a number of greats, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck with Rod Stewart, Jimi Hendrix and, multiple times, the early Fleetwood Mac, with and without Danny Kirwan. I became a Peter Green fan or freak and I would go whenever I could and figure out a way in and I had some friends and we actually ended up playing with him. We were all Mac fans, but particularly Peter Green fans. Sometimes Jeremy Spencer wouldn't participate and it would just be a trio. It was just unbelievable and gave me a lot more faith that I could maybe do this, if I applied myself.

Doing the blues is a huge series of mountains to climb and yet here was a guy who could write and play, but without affectation. He wasn't pretending to be anybody but who he was. Peter Green was the reason I went to those shows. To see somebody live with that intensity and focus and purpose and clearly spiritual depth was amazing emotionally. With the ability to convey emotion in one note or in streams of notes; it just seemed he was able to do anything he wanted to do with the guitar. He was a tremendous inspiration, so if I got 'anywhere near the neighbourhood' that would be a huge compliment.

There's also a version of *The Supernatural* on the album.

That was one I struggled over. I mean, obviously, you don't just want to imitate it. What's the point? He's already done it brilliantly, as good as it's ever going to be. So, can I do

something that has some individuality that can stand on its own, yet can be a tribute, an homage? I didn't realise as we were doing it that he was so close to passing.

And the final track, *A Headful of Ghosts*, that could be one of Peter's own.

Thank you for saying that. That really is an homage to him, without hopefully ripping off any of his songs. Yeah, I tried to play more sparsely. Yeah, that's a huge compliment, thank you.

I love the lyrics to *One Way Ticket*.

A friend introduced me to that track by Pleasant Joseph (aka Cousin Joe) and I've always wanted to try to find a way to do the song and I love those lyrics, because there's a tongue in cheek quality and yet there's wisdom along with that; it's a nice combination. That's someone who isn't so well known, isn't Joe. There might have been a few more verses, but I just chose the ones I most resonated with.

How did *Eleanor Rigby* come to be on the album?

Before I did *Mississippi Suitcase*, I thought I was going to put out an instrumental record and as part of that we did songs across genres. The bassist, Marc Hickox, who's a phenomenal bass player, he and I used to do a version of that several years ago. So, we were rehearsing and we talked about it and Mark is really a significant Beatles fan, so we tried it and initially it was more like a Ramsey Lewis *In Crowd* groove, but it kinda morphed a bit and got a little bit more rocked out and we thought 'Gee, it's kinda cool!' I have a fairly expansive idea of what constitutes blues. I don't believe it's limited to just one form. I know it's a cliché, but it's about Heart, Soul and Feeling. It's kind of a bluesy version of *Eleanor Rigby*.

But *Until My Love Come Down* is a definite Bluesy number

I've wanted to do this song for a long time.

I've always thought that Sonny Boy 1 (John Lee Williamson) didn't really get enough of his due in a certain regard. Sonny Boy 2 has such a commanding presence in the history of music, although I love him, but I also love Sonny Boy 1. I guess you can say it's double entendre, but it's pretty straight up. I hadn't ever recorded anything like that, you know, and initially maybe I was going to do that acoustically, with string bass and mandolin or something, but that would have been a little too close to the original, sonically, not that I can sing like John Lee Williamson! I think they are actually brilliant lyrics of the type that they are. I love the analogies with fruit! Yes, I guess it's unashamed! Sensuality is part of our nature, it's part of who we are.

And Lou Reed doesn't normally feature on Blues albums.

That's the one I struggled the most with. It was produced by Marco Giovino, who is an incredible producer and drummer. We did that

track in Nashville and he suggested that we do it. He said I think you can do a really interesting bluesy version of this. But I didn't really want to be seen to be promoting that lifestyle, having lost friends to it and so has my wife recently. But, on the other hand, it came out really cool, so once I got the OK from my better half, we went ahead with it. It's poetic in a certain way. It was a bit like a Derek and The Dominoes, with a slide and a straight guitar talking creatively to each other. That was the inspiration for the ending, Derek and The Dominoes.

Talking of poetry, *Beyond Here Lies Nothin'* has captured a sort of romantic yet desperate tone.

I very much agree. I love the complexity of it. It is very romantic, but there's a feeling that there's limited time. (or maybe I'm projecting?) I can relate to that, because I'm getting older. I'm not sure I ever saw this as clearly before, but you can see the day when you're not going to be here and so there is a desperation. In this version I tried to pull back the

“just let the lyric speak”



guitars, in the sense of less notes, and just let the lyric speak.

I think that balance comes across on the whole album, meaningful lyrics and great instrumentals. *She Likes To Boogie* is a great example.

I think Johnny Winter did a brilliant version of it. It's funny, there's a lot of history to that song. Louis Jordan did a big version of that. The version I was most directly inspired by was Frankie Lee Sims'. I did originally do a vocal version and then we were just messing about with it and said, 'Hey, why don't we just play it?' and we played it and were really happy with the way it came out, so that's how it made it on there, but initially I was singing it as well. I love that tune; I tried to get a little bit of several influences in there, you know there's some B.B.King and Freddie King and Peter Green and several other folks in there



in the solo. Tom West, the keyboardist, plays brilliantly on it.

Yes, you've got some really good names playing on the album.

Oh yeah, I was really proud to stand next to and play with these guys.

You must be really proud of the whole album.

I had a lot of help from the band and Ducky Carlisle who produced it with me and also engineered it. He is a genius. He's worked on Buddy Guy records. It's a privilege to work with him.

I can't believe this is just your third solo album.

Yeah, unfortunately I'm not prolific. I try to concentrate on the quality. I'm lucky to have a great team around me. It's what it comes down to.

Hopefully, some of the Blues Matters! readers will be able to pick up on it and enjoy it as much as I did.

I really hope so. Let's hope that the current situation is cleared up. I would love to come to the UK and play, if it's possible. I'm really missing live playing.



Find out more about Peter at:

www.peterparcekband.com

DISCOGRAPHY

- The Mathematics of Love (2010)
- Everybody wants to go to Heaven (2017)
- Mississippi Suitcase (2020)