

About Mirage

It was April 2nd, 2011, that Al and I played a Wild Rice concert in Menominee. It was less than a week since we'd come back from our (Marcia's and my) second trip to Paris together. We played well. It seemed so at the time, and listening back to the recording I made only reinforced that belief. Near the end of the 2nd set we played Al's tune *Half a Waltz*, a love song for his sweet wife, the lovely and talented Rhonda Welbel who, after hearing him sing it to her for the first time is reported to have said how much she loved it than asked would it have killed him to get the name Rhonda in there somewhere? Here are the lyrics to that beautiful tune...

Half a Waltz

*Never look a racehorse in the mouth
Always take the time to round the bend
Try to place a bet
Spark and hope it catches
Kiss me like the world's gonna end
I'm counting every moment since I saw you
I'm counting every person that's not you
Counting every season
Every rhyme and reason
Counting every pull to get me through*

*Blue as a whisper
Green as a meadow
Red as a pepper
Black as the night
Touch like a whisper
Breath like a meadow
Sweet like a pepper
I love you
Goodnight*

*Hold me while we're swimming in the chocolate
Wipe my eyes when summer makes me drunk
Drive me to the border
Smuggle me 'till tender
Find a way to get me out of town
One fine day I'll take you 'cross the ocean
One fine day we'll stay just where we are
Dancing on a match head
Waltzing in our sleep
Just a couple of fireflies int he stars*

*Blue as a whisper
Green as a meadow
Red as a pepper
Black as the night
Touch like a whisper
Breath like a meadow
Sweet like a pepper
I love you
Goodnight*

*Waltz me eternal
Forever
Goodnight*

I recall feeling that night that this song completely nailed exactly how I felt--about Marcia, about life--but I'll never know just why I was so powerfully moved by that tune at that time. Often when I sing I am deeply moved by what I'm singing, but I wasn't singing this time...Al was. Still, it's not important to know. It was only important to experience it and then to remember it a few weeks later driving the back roads down to Peoria. On that drive, that emotional musical moment as well as many experiences from our recently concluded trip sort of crowded up all together and got tangled into this Mirage song. It was hard to write--I was searching for the meaning of the Mirage metaphor while writing, *by* writing, I guess, so the words weren't exactly just writing themselves. And it was hard to learn to play...in places it's got a funky 9/8 time signature, in others, it's got a strange waltz feel in 6.

But I did write it, and I did tinker with the lyrics for months, and I did learn to play it, and it was the first thing I recorded for the album, back in the summer of 2011. I also realized shortly after recording the first tracks that this one could really use drums. I sent this email to my friend, the drummer, Timothy Bauer.

Sun, Jul 3, 2011 at 2:04 PM
Jul 3, 2011

Hey, Timothy...

Thanks a lot for your willingness to maybe find some percussion parts on some of the tunes I'm working on. I figure you'll maybe have a better feel for the music if I give you some background, so here goes.

The album (which, of course, should be called a CD, since "album" conjures up the image of a 13-inch vinyl disk, but "album" (within the context of "photo album") is more what I'm after here--a collection of songs and other sounds that relate to one another somehow) will be called *Mirage* because of a photo Marcia took of a bit of Parisian graffiti back in March (photo attached). The first song on the album will be the title cut--*Mirage*--but it won't be the first track on the CD. The first track is a 3:30 piece entitled "Madison to Pont Marie" (AKA "m to pm"...or perhaps I'll wind up calling it "Lutetia Express"--not sure yet). This track telescopes the 14 hours of travel from here to Paris into an aural postcard recorded on the little handheld digital unit I take along when I travel. Some folks snap pictures--I harvest sounds.

The M to PM track segues directly into *Mirage*, a song close to my heart, whose lyrics are printed below. The song tells the tale of performing last spring at a house concert when I suddenly became overwhelmed by the beauty of the song Al and I were in the middle of--a song I'd played with him a hundred times. I was so choked up by the beauty of it--how much it seemed to fit Marcia's and my lives together--that I could barely sing the harmony part. Upon reflection over the following weeks, it began to make sense that

the event had represented one of those "behind the veil" moments when some sort of deeper truth leaks out from beyond the mundane borders of reality. The rest of the song is a poet's attempt to describe the effect of experiencing such a moment.

The version of Mirage that I've attached will eventually be completely re-recorded, so pay no attention to the tuning differences between instruments, the pitch problems on the vocal track, the flatulent and circumlocutious ending...none of them will be around for long. The arrangement is probably going to be similar to this, though--gtr, banjo, mando, vox and probably no other instrumentation other than percussion. I definitely hear some sort of rhythmic element...let's see if you do, too.

stay well (and off roofs if you can) and I'll see you soon...

Even at that early point in the album's progress, the Mirage metaphor was central to the rest of what was going on, and it was evident that this song would somehow be the centerpiece of it all. The notion that ambient Parisian street/cafe sounds would be an important part of the album was also front and center at that moment.

A couple of weeks later, after recording a second draft of Mirage with a lot of background ambient stuff, it was a great joy to hear Marcia declare it "a miraculous weaving of sound" when I played it for her. I took that as at least one thumb up, and her kind words as well as those from a few other trusted advisors (thanks, guys...you know who you are) fueled the subsequent recording/writing/designing that have culminated in the album and the cafe.

There's a great deal of ambient sound in this one, most of it from Paris. The laughing college kids on Rue Monge, the fountain in Place des Vosges, the string quartet from the Metro St. Paul stop, the Luxembourg Gardens piano player, glasses of St. Emilion clinking at Les Pijos, a woman in high heels smartly striding down the mosaic tiled floor of the Galerie Vivienne, our old buddy, Kevin, shaking his dog-collared head, background conversation from a cafe, even a team of horses being driven in the street just west of the Notre Dame plaza...maybe it sounds like noise to you, but it all conjures up beautiful memories to me. When I started recording this one I planned to have ambient sound behind all of the tracks on the record and even to weave all 13 songs into one two-hour long piece. I recall telling Jet my plan and, after a respectful pause, he asked, "When was the last time you sat down and listened to music for 2 hours straight?" His

point, along with Al's somewhat more direct comments on the subject, got me thinking maybe the songs ought to stand apart from the ambient sound a little more. Hence, there's little to no ambient sound in the other tunes. However, now that the album's done, I'm going to create little Operas consisting of three or four tunes stitched together with ambient segue-ways. The ones and zeroes are free, after all, and it seems such a waste to do less than everything possible with all this sound.

The main components of this recording consist of banjo, guitar and mandolin--a nice little trio feel--with bass and Timothy's wonderful drums filling things out. An electric guitar part finds its way in there, too, and if you listen real close you might think you're hearing a mysterious female voice...it's probably just a mirage.