

## Michael's Moon Sickness Notes.

Each successive Caribbean record is, to my mind, an attempt to be get closer and closer to an ideal: the group as an almost invisible force providing only the fundamental information needed to communicate songs. It's not a fully conscious effort any longer (if it ever was); we try to stay out of the way and let the songs, with their essential gears and pinions, do all the work. I think we used to refer to this as being "more direct," I now see it as something a little more metaphysical than that. On Moon Sickness, the process has become as seamless as it's ever been and this, I think, feeds into our ability to keep from interfering with the transmission. Whether it's the advent of strict deadlines in our artistic universe or something else, we seem to have fashioned a method of making a record that feels synchronized and cooperative in new ways. We're a testy bunch, so arguments are inevitable, but every debate seems to, almost effortlessly, lead to an obvious, clear solution. Of course, we may look back someday to the making of Moon Sickness as the calm between storms and gallows laugh about it, but it's been a pretty revelatory experience so far.

I didn't write any songs for about two years after finishing the last record, Discontinued Perfume. I don't even remember why – maybe because making that record was pretty difficult. Moon Sickness officially started for me with the title song, which I somewhat hastily assembled for a charity event hosted by great DC theater group, Taffety Punk. I was performing solo and wanted something in the same tuning as the song The Clock Tower (from Discontinued Perfume), which I knew I wanted to play. I finished the song at about 5pm the evening of the event and played it on a little parlour guitar at Capitol Hill Arts Workshop just a few hours later. As Matt and Dave now also know, it's a dicey little number, so this was a much ballsier proposition than I realized, but it came off well and people seemed to really like it. "I hope your bandmates like it," they told me. Fortunately, they did. The important thing, though: we were on our way. Matt loved the song but warned me: Don't get too deep into this arpeggiation thing; we did that just fine on Discontinued Perfume. I was listening to a lot of The Who and, perhaps because of that, wrote stuff with sweet, clean, declarative chords and spiraling melodies. There are even some power chords. Dave was all like, Yeah baby!

The songs –

**We're Both Villains.** This is a story song, cobbled together through reading and chatting with a single friend of mine who can't keep from getting emotionally entangled with married women. The subject is – at least to some extent – the jealous husband. Some jealous husbands have good, concrete, evidentiary reasons for their jealousy; others simply have a Beautiful Wife Problem – a man married to someone who's hot and groovy and most men meeting her dig her within two minutes. We're Both Villains is written sort of as a conversation between Beautiful Wife and Admiring Male Friend (with whom she may or may not have a romance heating up) and sort of à la John Fowles' The Collector, told from the two's alternating points of view. In this case, Jealous Husband – as some husbands I know do – uses, without shame, artifice, or subtlety, the Fear of God to keep his wife in line and cast anyone who looks at his wife sideways as a sinner. Applying the Jesus-As-Thought-Police interpretation of the bible, Jealous Husband simultaneously casts Admiring Male Friend in an unflattering light and plants the seed in the mind of Beautiful Wife that to the extent she, in any fashion, is attracted to any man not her

husband, she is cheating in the eyes of God. This song is built on top of a beautiful electronic drum part emailed to me by Tony.

**Jobsworth.** In the live version of another Discontinued Perfume song, Artists in Exile, we hit a sort of Big Moment coda wherein Matt steers the vehicle with this insistent 4/4 that's a little sneaky in ways I still don't understand. I asked him if he felt like recording that part so I could write something around it and he did so. Dave immediately heard the Townshendy aspects of this song and got very excited (he *would*). He responded accordingly and this song become something of a driving two-guitar *thing*. Not many work-related songs on this record, but this is one. Simple idea: sometimes work is OK – even interesting and pleasurable, but working for someone else always ruins everything. The Portuguese in the song is a bit of a gratuity, but it's a really fun language to speak and sing.

**Moon Sickness.** As mentioned above, this song was written for a specific time and place, but as soon as it was finished and responded to at the Taffety Punk event, I knew it had legs. As is often the case, the song really filled out into a living, breathing organism once Matt and Dave started ruminating. The recorded version isn't too too distant from the live version, which is very much a rarity for us. Moon Sickness is narrated by a General Medical Practitioner on a moonbase and he tells us about how he deals with hypochondriac patients there – of which there appear to be many. Not really the best bedside manner. Dave and I were definitely guitar geeks on this song, giggling like schoolgirls when we recorded his part, especially the “lead” in the coda.

**Electric Bass.** Another quasi-science fiction entry. Not really entirely certain what this song is about, but I've always liked the way some records in the '70s would credit the bass player with “electric bass,” which gave it a simultaneously futuristic and archaic sound. The legendary Angel record Helluva Band (the title just screams ART!) – I remember seeing *Mickey Jones – Electric Bass* and thinking that was cool and evocative (even if the record was neither). Note: that I thought Angel was cool is worth taking into consideration here. Don's electric bass part *is* really cool and possibly my favorite thing he's played on the electric bass. Ever. Also love the clean wireyness of Dave's guitar. I doubled my voice, which sounds more egomaniacal than it is. The song is vaguely how falling in love feels a little like an electric bass pulsating through the body. That's an aside, but that's how it becomes a “she” song, I guess. Antoine Sanfuentes, who played drums on the song Discontinued Perfume, emailed me the drums to this song with a “not sure if you can use this.” It sounded great and had a squooshy groove he's always really good at playing. So, yeah, we used it. WE USED THE SHIT OUT OF IT!

**Sixteen Kingdoms.** Y'know, any excuse to use the word Rolodex. Built atop a totally schizoid, masterful Tony electronic drum part – via email, natch. This was written over the course of several months, but that's all I remember. It's one of those situations where writer works really hard on something in isolation, becomes frustrated, and puts it away in a drawer for a few months. That never worked for me as a short story writer (after time away, everything read like something from John Cheever, Raymond Carver, or Richard Yates), but it worked here. I don't even remember what frustrated me about it or if I simply said to myself, “Eh, Matt won't like this.” Hard to tell.

**The Chemistry Sisters.** This was one of those titles that came about from a happy misread on my part. I don't remember what the words actually said, but once I thought I

saw this, it didn't really matter. I had an opening line "They peek through the curtains on opening night." So the song would be about the theater. Looked up Saint Genesius (patron saint of actors) – this is not the type of information I just know. Luckily, it fit into that melody line. What are the chances? Then the song became about the strange ambivalence of wanting to perform and wanting not to perform because you don't think anyone's going to come out to see you and you'd just as soon avoid the embarrassment. It doesn't really happen to me anymore, but I used to quarrel with this dichotomy. I used to think too much. This is our friend Antoine Sanfuentes again providing the loop. I was recording him for someone else's session and he was just playing around, so I hit record, then later sampled and looped his part into two sections: one in 3/4, the other 4/4. Then I separated out this big, beautiful fill he did. Notable, too: Matt's little vocal choir in the second verse as well as his inspired bass part, which would sound totally at home on an Association or Petula Clark record.

**I Haven't Given Up Hoping.** I'd been sitting on the faint trace of an Antoine Sanfuentes drum loop for some time. I dug it but it needed some sauce, y'know? It was pretty faint and hazy. Matt, who plays drums in a way that couldn't be much different from Antoine, created a hoppy, thumping beat that I looped. These two loops provided the atmosphere for the song. As usual, I don't remember writing it. I do remember the glee I felt when Dave brought over his very Claus Ogerman, stringy, synth arrangement for the second verse. That sealed the deal on this song. This song is, I suppose, faux optimistic: the narrator is hoping to understand where, when, and how he could have gone so wrong in his life, even reviewing plat books and microfiche in a "pharaonic tomb" to try to get to the bottom of it. It's a thing The Caribbean does sometimes: attempting to apply literal, practical solutions to spiritual problems. The internet does that to us a bit – we're so used to finding answers with the punch of ENTER, we feel like we ought to be able to research a solution to anything.

**Echopraxia.** I found this word in a Gene Wolfe novel, *The Shadow of the Torturer*. Gene Wolfe, a former industrial engineer in Illinois (he contributed to the design of Pringles), writes extremely complex fantasy novels and has a big cult following. I never ever read fantasy novels, but I heard Wolfe was *different* and deliriously talented. Both of these descriptions were true, which doesn't necessarily mean I've read any Gene Wolfe since. At one point the protagonist is taken to a brothel called Echopraxia in the Algedonic Quarter of the city of Nessus (yeah, I know) and the word echopraxia just intoxicated me. Echopraxia means "the involuntary repetition or imitation of the observed movements of another," which made me even more delirious and it dawned on me that I could think of dozens of examples in my own life where I began to talk like the people around me or unintentionally copped the handwriting of my friend Dan Abrams in the 1980s. The song contains only vague references because that seemed appropriate with the gauzy title of the song. Matt came up with the drum part in about eight minutes and, to my knowledge, imitated no one in the process, intentionally or otherwise.

**Imitation Air.** Talk about songs I have no memory of writing. All I know of Imitation Air is the following: (1) Tony's drums were recorded by TJ Lipple at Inner Ear many years ago; (2) I assembled much of it as an experiment in 2010-11 with no plan to turn it over to The Caribbean and, really, no plan to ever really finish it (this is borne out by what a pain-in-the-ass the song is to sing); and (3) was inspired by two very distinct pieces of music, *Man in the Mirror* by Michael Jackson and the theme to the *Rockford Files*. I played it to Matt not long ago just as a "listen to this strange piece of flotsam" time-killer

and he said “I want that!” Dave had the same reaction – just swooned. They were both like, Finish this fucker! So here it is. The song wound up being about a patient – disintegrating under the strain of whatever afflicts him – falling in love with his German nurse because she reminds him of one of my own true loves, air conditioning. The song weaves between an almost disembodied Matrix-like fantasy narrative and his clear grasp of the situation’s cold reality.