

# ... and furthermore #26



25 January 2007

Once again, here it comes right at you and right before – well, almost right before – Corflu 24, the addendum zine that doesn't know the time of day, or can read the calendar,

...and furthermore #26

produced on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of January in the year 2007. The person responsible for this is none other than that purveyor of electronic natterings,

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cover by Tiffany Toland (from Elfwood website)

clip art – 3, 4, 6

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In our last episode...

...we left our readership at the edge of the Dales of Dafia. I refer to, of course, my musical autobiography, which has now reached the end of the Eighties. On November 27, 1989, I married my second wife, Valerie Prochaska, who came with a ready-made family: her 4-year daughter, Penny. Cute little girl, too. (You should see her *now*. Hands off, Garcia, if you know what's good for you!) This happened about 16 months after Lori and I had split, which was a good thing, I have to admit. As preamble to this last chapter of my musical autobiography, it needs to be understood right off that I was definitely drifting out of fandom. Didn't want to, but it happened as my interests and time were consumed with job and family. Valerie and I had two of our own kids: Josie came first on February 3, 1991, and then Daniel, October 7, 1995. We now had a full house of family to go with the pets we began to acquire – cats, dogs, birds, guinea pigs, fish... You get the picture.

To make this menagerie work required something that I had never really understood before, but now came to appreciate: the need for faith. And the results of my new-found faith were very unexpected, especially in how it brought me full circle back to the first real love of my life: music.



JOHNNY!!!  
Turn that f\*\*\*ing  
thing down!! We can't hear  
ourselves **think** up here!



## faith and re-birth

I have always loved music: listening to it, playing it, writing it. When I was a little kid, my parents spotted this latent talent I had because I used to assemble complex drum kits at home out of empty shoe boxes, different sizes of empty coffee cans with plastic lids, cymbals from the thin metal sheets from my erector set – attached to stands constructed from a large tinker toy tube – and so forth. Long unsharpened pencils were my drumsticks at first; when I discovered chopsticks in a kitchen drawer, then those became my drumsticks.

Once assembled, I used to tap and bang out rhythms for hours on end, probably driving my parents nuts. I even made up songs, singing and smashing away like a little drummer boy on crack. Eventually my parents tired of this nonsense, getting me a 20-dollar Kingston acoustic guitar for Christmas when I was nine; they probably figured that would be much quieter and a lot more melodic than home-made drum sets.

Where my musical genius – if it can be called that – came from was anybody's guess. Mom and dad were totally unmusical, but they listened to records constantly. The only relative who seemed to have any musical ability was mom's brother Dan – who everybody called Buddy – who played guitar and led a jazz band for a brief time in New York City back around 1950. His band played at my parent's wedding (August 27,

1950), and their wedding photo album has a picture of the lovely newlyweds dancing in front of the bandstand. I believe Uncle Buddy's band name was the Hi-Liters; some day I'll have to dig out that wedding album to double-check.

At any rate, my family was Irish Roman Catholic. That's how I was raised. After Vatican II hit the fan in 1963, my parents were so disgusted with the proposed changes, that they quit the Catholic church, and switched to Unitarian Universalist a couple years later. (*Big* difference, ain't it?)

Fast forward to the fall of 1990. Valerie and I had just moved down to Des Moines, Iowa, where I had landed a job at the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Iowa headquarters as a Third Party Insurance Specialist. At the same beer-tasting party where we met Mark and Linda Wren and members of the Des Moines Science Fiction Society (see *In a Prior Lifetime #13*), there was this couple standing aside, who were neighbors of the Wrens: Terry and Joanie Wilkinson. They were a quite couple, but easy to talk with, and had a great sense of humor.

We also learned at that party that Terry was the pastor of a small church, Harvest Baptist, that met in a nearby elementary school. Now, Josie was on the way at the time, and Val and I weren't really happy with the Presbyterian church in town that we

had visited a few times. Desiring to raise our children with a grounding in the church and not to be afraid of it, we decided to accept the Wilkinson's invitation to come and see what Harvest Baptist was like.

As it turned out, we liked it very much. Only about 40 members strong of mostly young families, it felt like an extended family. Everyone knew each other, helped out when needed, and it was a tight family-oriented church group. Eventually we joined, and Terry and Joanie encouraged me to play guitar for them. Terry baptized us on March 11, 1992; I still have and use the Bible that Terry presented to me as a baptismal gift.



Not surprisingly, I started writing Christian songs during this time. In fact, most of the songs I wrote in the early 90s were Christian, usually songs that dealt with a personal search for meaning and purpose in life, seeking a relationship with Jesus Christ in my life. Whenever I played these at Harvest, they were always well-received, and I still have these in my song files. Once in a while I still play them, and remember the events that triggered a particular song and why it was so important for me to write it.

This all began in 1991, and when Valerie and I moved back up to Minneapolis in early 1992, we hooked up with Evergreen Community Church, which met in the auditorium of a huge junior high school in Bloomington, Minnesota. The first time we attended, their church band, Second Wind, kicked into this jazz-rock number that

caught me completely off-guard. I mean, I liked it a lot! I had no idea that Christian music could rock out. We then noticed in their bulletin that the worship team was looking for new singers and musicians, so naturally I auditioned and got the gig.

So from late 1992 to the end of 1993, I played electric guitar (rhythm and lead) in Band B of Second Wind; they had two versions so that band members could attend a weekend service instead of always being committed to playing for all the services (three every weekend). It was fun, too. Second Wind played a few summer concerts at Starring Lake Park in Eden Prairie, which had an open-air amphitheater overlooking a playground next to a small, man-made lake. It was a pretty area, and totally cool. I felt like I was part of a real musically growing band.

Unfortunately, there came to be rifts in Evergreen Community Church, which was a Great Commission Church. There were serious money issues (hands in the pot kind of a deal), and even allegations of sexual impropriety on the part of one of their pastors (they had *four*, due to the size of the membership – over 4000 attended services each week). That was enough for us. A church should be a refuge from the problems of the world, not contributing to them.

Before we left Evergreen, though, I have to relate that it was through playing in Second Wind that I met Lisa Keith and her husband, Spencer Bernard. Check this out this entry from Answers.com:

Lisa Keith is a Christian contemporary singer, probably best known for her work as a backing vocalist for other artists and lead vocalist on [Herb Alpert's](#) hit single "[Making Love In The Rain](#)". In [1993](#) she released her solo debut album "Walkin' in the Sun" on [Perspective Records](#); which featured production from [Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis](#), [Narada Michael Walden](#) and Lisa's husband [Spencer Bernard](#). The first single "Better Than You" peaked at #36 on Billboard's

Hot 100 while the follow-up single "I'm in Love" reached #84.

In addition to working as a backing vocalist, Lisa has also co-written several songs for other artists; such as [New Edition's](#) "Crucial" and [Nona Hendryx's](#) "Why Should I Cry".

Lisa and Spencer eventually moved down to Nashville, hoping to crack the country music scene, they had a baby, and that's the last I've ever heard anything about her. If you check her discography online, Lisa's done background vocals for Janet Jackson, Alexander O'Neill, Amy Grant, and many other artists. She is a talented young lady with a wonderful voice – I have her single "Better Than You" and debut album both on cassette – and it's neat to say that I had the pleasure of being in her band when she sang at Evergreen Community Church.

After Valerie and I left Evergreen, we attended Bethel Baptist Church in Sunfish Lake, MN (about five minutes southeast of Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport). A couple times I played my songs there, and I will always remember this sweet black woman who said a very loud "Amen!" at one of the lines in my song, "You Are My Refuge" which was based on Psalm 46. My music touched somebody that day, and that's something very hard to relate. She came up to me afterwards, telling me that I had a gift. That was humbling, especially since I didn't even know who she was!

While all this Christian musical stuff was going on, I began working full-time at the Schmitt Music store in Edina, MN as a sales and school representative. Through this job, I met and hooked up with lots of professional musicians in the area. This was really a God-send to me – funny how that works – because this is how I ended up playing guitar in jazz big bands from 1993 to 1995 in the Minneapolis area: the Stan Bann Big Band, the Just Friends Big Bands, and the Nova Contemporary Jazz Orchestra. I was even a card-carrying member of the

AFM (American Federation of Musicians) for those years. For the first time in my life, I was getting paid real money – well, sort of – for a change.



*The Stan Bann Big Band at the 2003 Hot Summer Jazz Festival in Minneapolis. Photo from the SB3 website.*

All of these jazz bands played standard monthly gigs at O'Gara's Pub in St. Paul: the Stan Bann Big Band played every first Friday of the month; Just Friends was there on the second Friday; and the Nova Contemporary Jazz Orchestra had the second and fourth Sunday night slots. I usually got about \$60 bucks a night (since I was union) and free beer during these gigs. Needless to say, most of the musicians took advantage of the free beer deal, so the playing got a bit loose by the third set.

One time, in late May of 1995, there was a jazz festival at Starring Lake Park with something like eleven bands and combos playing from about 10:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night. Two of my groups played the festival. The Stan Bann Big Band went on at 2:00 PM, followed at 3:15 PM by the Just Friends Big Band. That was fun; once my gear was all set up, I simply stayed on stage for a couple hours and had fun. There was a pretty good crowd, too, and everyone seemed to have a good time. No free beer that day, however, but that was fine by me.

Those were great times, and of all the bands that I have played in over the years, this was the period (as a jazz musician) where I believe I really grew as a musician. Listening to these other pros blending and improvising was an incredible learning experience, and I pushed myself to be on a par with them, which in my mind I never fully achieved. Even so, the director of Just Friends told me that one of the reasons he had called me was that he had heard I was one of the best comp guitarists in the Twin Cities. Boy, did *that* make me feel good. I had no idea I was developing a rep in the local music scene.

Another weird thing happened to me by dint of working at Schmitt Music. I caught wind of a country-rock band that was making lots of positive noise in the local Twin Cities music scene, the Sir Brothers. They were *really* good – making demos and pitching themselves heavily in Nashville – and I heard they were looking for a new and permanent lead guitarist. So I called them up, Val and I went to hear them play in Columbia Heights, and then I talked with Joe Sir and his two brothers; the three of them made up 60% of the band, and they were getting tired of hiring fill-in guitar-slingers at the last minute for gigs.

Well, Joe gave me their demo tape so I could practice, but the audition never transpired. This all happened shortly after the release of their first album, *Sittin' On Ready* (1994), but then they seemed to go into a holding pattern. I never really heard from them again, and a Google search indicates that they broke up somewhere around 1997, having gotten disappointed one too many times by the Nashville music scene. It is a tough business to break into, and I thought those guys had the look and sound to do it.

Funny thing, too; that's what Lisa Keith was also trying to do. Again, nothing came from her efforts, which is a shame. Both Lisa and the Sir Brothers had a ton of talent and

drive, but cracking the music business just wasn't in the cards for either of them, which was too bad.

So by the time we moved our family back down to Marshalltown, Iowa in the fall of 1995, I had made significant gains as a musician. I was 41 years old and figured that my years as a professional musician were behind me.

However, I still play my guitar and write songs, although not as much as I used to. Ever since I met Bill Fischer, I have kept a copy of all the songs I've written, dated and organized in chronological order, inside sheet protectors in ring binders. There are now over 250 songs in my catalogue; if I still had all the songs I wrote before 1975, the total would probably be something like 500. Most of these songs are not very good – Sturgeon's Law applies here as well, it must be said – which is to be expected. But even if ten percent of them are considered good, that means I have 25 songs that are worthy to be heard.

So I continue to play and write. Be forewarned and fore-armed, people: I am bringing my Fender Avalon acoustic guitar to Corflu.

You may want to bring earplugs.



# electronic epistles

*Here we go yet again. It is time for me to reach into my magic bag and see what the Unusual Gang of Suspects has sent to me about the last issue. Leading things off is the leader of this gang, none other than the one and the only CHRISTOPHER J. GARCIA:*

Date: Thu, 11 Jan 2007 13:27:07 -0800

From: "Chris Garcia"

<[garcia@computerhistory.org](mailto:garcia@computerhistory.org)>

To: "John Purcell"

<[j\\_purcell54@yahoo.com](mailto:j_purcell54@yahoo.com)>

Yeah, that's a freakin' gorgeous cover! I wish I could catch fish bare handed. There are people who use their hands to catch catfish, but they are rare and certainly not nearly as stacked as that chick! *{I love fishing, but haven't done much of it down here in Texas yet.}*

You're bringing your guit with ya to QuireFlu! That's rad. I'll bring my tone-deaf self and we can duet. *{Eeww, this sounds dangerous!}*

It interesting that you kept track of how many songs you wrote during the olden tymes (1975-1979). 25 a year's more than Elvis Costello claims to write nowadays (he says he manages to squeeze out about 5 a year, though he's got a backlog from the 1980s that'll last him through the Century). They say that the last time you play is always the most memorable. I can remember the last time I was on stage (May 2nd, 1997) and the last time I did ComedySportz (May 19th, 1993). That last con before your triumphant return must have been a good one. *{Sad but fun. The old bittersweet deal. I can't imagine what going to a current Minicon would be like. Totally surreal, I am sure.}*

Good letter section. I'm still figuring how to make Frank realize the error of his ways. If I were to make a list of my favourite albums, then I'm not sure what would be on it.

Chris

*{Frank has an interesting range of musical tastes. He's not wrong; merely strange. Let's share a room together at QuireFlu, shall we? Yes. Let's!}*

*And now, here's another person who has something to say about music and favorite songs/albums, our friend from out East, ERIC MAYER:*

Eric Mayer <[maywrite2@epix.net](mailto:maywrite2@epix.net)> wrote:  
Date: Thu, 11 Jan 2007 23:28:20 -0500

From: Eric Mayer <[maywrite2@epix.net](mailto:maywrite2@epix.net)>

To: [j\\_purcell54@yahoo.com](mailto:j_purcell54@yahoo.com)

Frank Wu sure has good taste, even if I don't agree with him about *Sgt Pepper*. Maybe you had to be there, but I really think that album revolutionized the way people thought about what rock music was and could be. Sure, things were opening up, but that just knocked all the walls down.

But Frank's top five is interesting. The Darlene Love Christmas song might be the best Christmas song, and "The Letter" I've always thought was really underrated, and I agree, if I had to pick one Stones' song it'd

