

Liner Notes

Arlon Bennett: "Summer's Voice"

by Dave Bannen



Arlon, I was absolutely delighted to hear that you would spend some time with us in the next few pages. You are one of the most giving singer songwriters I've met. I really appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts on the craft of songwriting with us.

For our readers I've included some of your recent accomplishments.

2006 Kerrville Music to Life Showcase

2005 Rosegarden Song Competition Winner

2005 South Florida Folk Festival

2005 Plowshares Finalist

2004 Great Waters Festival (2nd Place)

1999 Kerrville Folk Festival (TX)

Dave: Arlon, your songs have taken you to some amazing places. Arthur Ashe's memorial service and Shea Stadium come to mind. Tell us about how you came to write your tribute to Bob Murphy with "Summer's Voice".

Arlon: Well, I had just arrived home and I was listening to WFAN, the local New York sports radio station. The news update announced the passing of Hall of Fame broadcaster Bob Murphy who did Met games ever since the team's inception. It hit me hard because he was not only the classiest of people, but he'd been doing those games since I was a runny-nose kid chasing baseballs into sewer pipes and listening to games under my pillow. For some reason, you think certain voices are constants in your life and will never go away. He was one of them, and I needed to write about him and those like him.

Dave: "Summer's Voice" is your latest CD project. Tell us what we can expect on your new CD?

Arlon: It's an eclectic collection that I'm really proud of. There are some songs with jazz influence, a song that was picked by Noel Stookey to perform at the Kerrville Folk Festival, and some stories ranging from an encounter with a Vietnam Veteran ("Bandana Man") to a fun ditty called "Red Light Kiss". I think I pushed my envelope to the next level. It

will be ready by the beginning of 2007 and available on iTunes, CD Baby, and naturally my website!

Dave: What Hurdles have you overcome to pull this project together?

Arlon: How much space do I have? (LoL) It really has not been that bad. I recorded the tracks in Nashville, and did the vocals in New Jersey. Overall, I'd say it went well, though it took longer than I thought it would. Such is how it is! When was the last time you heard an artist finish their project ahead of schedule? If anything, it was lacking one producer with a vision. There were three producers on this record including myself. That makes for some advantages and disadvantages. I'm happy with the way it came out though.

Dave: You mentioned that you recorded most of your "Summer's Voice" CD in Nashville. What was your reasoning for using a Nashville studio versus recording the project in your local area?

Arlon: I thought it would be nice to use great new musician's. I have some very talented friends, but thought

that this project needed an infusion of something different. I think I got it too. The great thing about it was that the musicians did not gravitate to country. They fit right into the vision I had.

Dave: What advice would you give someone thinking about releasing their first CD? Any valuable lessons you'd like to pass along?

Arlon: Uhh.. how much space do I have? (LoL!) I would say this.. Run your songs through the mill. Play them out, gauge the audience response, work them through and rehearse them. Make sure your voice is in the right place, and that you make charts (or have them made) for guest artists. Bring them to a song group to help hone them down so that there are NO questions in the studio. While doing this, search for a producer who shares your vision and



Arlon Bennett

steps up to help you do it. Easy, huh?

Dave: Let me steer our discussion into the craft side of songwriting. What's your typical song writing process like? Do you come up with an idea first, or do you let a good melody dictate what the song is about?

Arlon: A little of both. I'm more idea and lyric driven, but if the melody is not strong, it dies. I try to write in the morning most of the time. I am working more and more at writing from melodies though. It's always a good idea to try things that you are not comfortable with – to push your boundaries.

Dave: Do you write your songs on the guitar? Do you typically have a lyric in mind before you write your music?

Arlon: Yes, I'm a guitar-based writer, but often write lyrics with a melody in my head before ever picking up the guitar. It can be difficult because once you pick up your instrument, you tend to go to the same progressions that you know and feel comfortable with. This can hamper your efforts to write new fresh things that keep your songwriting growing.



Dave: I know you do a fair amount of traveling. How often do you write?

Arlon: I try to write a little each day. I love having my 'space' at home, and when I'm out of it, I'm not very productive. I do however get ideas all the time, so I'm always writing them down along with lyric ideas when I'm on the road. Then I go back to those ideas when I'm back in my space... which reminds me that I have a Myspace page too.

Dave: Arlon you seem to have a knack for cutting right to the core of a song. How do you do such a good job of staying focused on your ideas?

Arlon: Remember, you have only heard the final versions! If you look at my worksheets, I can get scattered all over the place. But that's what helps get you focused. With experience I have learned more and more to stay focused on

the core idea of a song. I love to learn from the masters and see how they focus on a single direction of the core idea. The second you split an idea or lyric in two or more directions, listeners lose their interest. You only have 3, 4, or 5 minutes to emotionally take people somewhere.

Dave; How much rewriting do you do?

Arlon: A good amount, because the core idea and lyric will usually only take me so far. The rest is crafting and honing the song to final stage. Even the final stage does not sort itself out until I have performed it out a few times.

Dave: I can tell that you spend a lot of time rewriting your lyrics. How much time do you spend on rewriting your melodies?

Arlon: I have gotten better at this with time. I look at melodies much more now and rewrite them as I need to.

Dave: When writing your music, are you thinking about chord progressions, in a Nashville numbers kind of way, or are you playing what sounds good to your ear?

Arlon: I write what is sounding good, and then see where the progression lands. It's actually fun that way. With many of the songs on "Summer's Voice", I discovered the progression when we wrote the charts!

Dave: Arlon I appreciate you forwarding me the new songs for your "Summer's Voice" CD. I like every song on the CD. "Even if you never said a prayer" is a very moving song. What is the story behind this song?

Arlon: That one came about at a songwriting exercise class about 5 years ago. I went out under a tree and wrote the chorus right away. I then sat on it for 2 or 3 years wondering about it. I started learning and playing in open D tuning in the meantime, and came up with a progression one day. I knew right away that it fit the chorus lyric. The verses then came easy (with some rewriting or course!)

Dave: What's next for Arlon?

Arlon: A baby in February! Then another baby called "Summer's Voice". I am putting my CD release plan together right now. Hopefully I can come down to Texas and do some shows!

Dave: Well Congratulations on the new born! You're set up to have an exciting 2007,... with two new baby's,... Twins! Arlon this was great, on behalf of the Houston Fort



Bend Songwriters Association I thank you for your valuable time, and insight. Please let us know when you plan a visit to Texas.

Arlon: It was my pleasure Dave. Does that last line sound straight out of 2001: A Space Odyssey? Thanks again for having me!

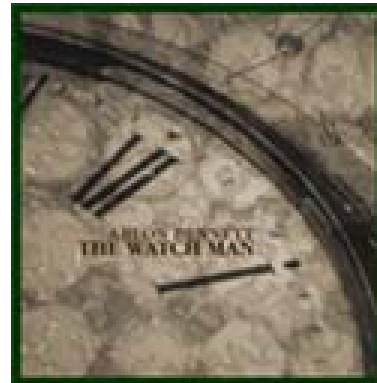
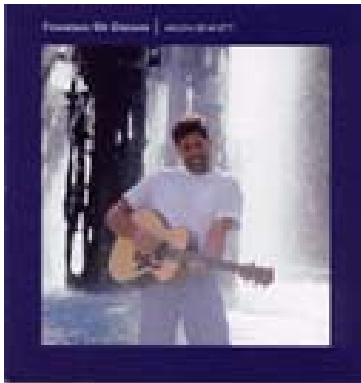
Check out Arlon's website at: <http://www.arlonbennett.com/>

Or his my space page at: www.myspace.com/Arlon

You can pick up Arlon's songs on iTunes, and at www.cdaby.com

The Music

Summer's Voice: To be released in January 2007.



The Watch Man: *"The Watch Man" is Arlon's latest release, hitting the ground running in 2001. It contains 11 songs that feature a wide range of styles and subjects. From a cynical and playful look at today's youth, to a bluesy song about creation, to the stirring rendition of war (from it's own point of view!), and finally a story of a young boy saved by "The Watch Man" himself. There's also a gem of hidden track on this one!*

Dave Bannen is an HFBSWA member and an NSAI Coordinator for the Houston chapter.

by Ron Tintner

THE TECHNOLOGY OF LANGUAGE

This month will be somewhat of a change in pace in this technology column. I'm going to discuss the technology of language as it applies to songwriting. I'm taking a somewhat stream of consciousness approach as this is a subject I've been thinking about at length for the last six months or so. This will also be somewhat opinionated -- maybe someone will disagree strenuously and we can provoke deeper discussion and thought. Much of my own thinking for this stimulated by the book: "The Poet's Handbook" (Writer's Digest Books, 2001) by Judson Jerome

One of the statements that comes up in songwriting and in our group in particular, is that "lyrics are not poetry." Well, sorry to disagree, but in fact lyrics are poetry -- in fact they constitute a proper subset of poetry; that is, all lyrics are poetry, but not all poetry is lyrics. The term lyric derives from the Greek "lyre," as originally the lyre was used as accompaniment to spoken poetry. Virtually all music has rhythm, and most modern Western music is metric -- that is, it is measured off into rhythmic subunits. Jerome defines poetry as "metrical writing," delineates all the different types of meter and shows how they can be used. Meters can be regular or irregular -- in music we defined the latter usually with the term "rubato." Ezra Pound proved that regular meter, although an important device of poetry, is not absolutely essential.

One of the chief goals of our lyrics is to make them conversational. This suggests that it has a similar word composition (i.e., vocabulary or vernacular) and usage as modern conversation. This is also a goal of modern poetry. Much, if not most, modern poetry is neither rhymed nor metric. In modern poetry, a common goal is for the poem to "speak" to

contemporaries -- and as such it should also be "conversational" -- and because modern conversation is neither highly rhymed nor highly (regularly) metric, poetry has in large part strayed from this.

Another feature we typically associate with poetry is rhyme. What is rhyme? Why do we rhyme? Rhyme actually constitutes all the techniques that produce acoustic resonance in our poem/lyric. This includes alliteration, assonance and near rhyme. These techniques are used in ordinary conversational language to enhance our semantic message. But we use these like spices and try not to make them too dense or predictable.

The definition of perfect end rhyme is that "two rhyming units sound the same except for the initial sound of the last stressed syllable." Perfect rhyming words are a relative rarity in English -- as opposed to Italian for example -- and as such, when they occur they tend to draw attention. Therefore, by using frequent perfect rhyme we are pulling ourselves away from the goal of making our lyrics conversational. In addition, since perfect rhymes are relatively rare, the chance of a given rhyme already having been used (in a known song) is relatively high, and so our lyric becomes predictable and blatantly unoriginal. The rhyme calls attention to itself and so, makes this stick out even more. By using relatively common words to rhyme -- especially as the second of a rhyming pair, this is downplayed. When we use frequent perfect end rhyme, and a very regular rhyming pattern, we are making our lyric predictable. This has several consequences -- both good and bad:

- 1) It might make it easy to remember (like mnemonic techniques).
- 2) It might make things progres-

sively duller.

3) It gives it a rhythm

4) Lastly, it might be

"pseudopredictable" -- that is, sets up an expectation in the listener, that we can then break to create surprise/tension to move our composition along. Of course, when we do something unpredictable, it can also have a disrupting effect and we always must consider this.

Setting up expectations and then either meeting them or not helps set up a journey of tension and release. We do this with melodies. In fact, an analysis of the most creative pieces of music show that there a relatively (but not too) high percentage of unexpected note sequences. If you read textbooks on music composition, the key element to hold the listener is tension and release. This holds true for musical compositions, but also holds true for all narrative works -- even though many musical pieces do not have a definite programmatic progression -- including poems, novels, movies, even something like amusement park rides. Imagine a ride through the haunted house, or the roller coaster -- there is constant tension and resolution. In music, the most common final harmonic cadence is the resolution of the dominant 7 cord to the tonic (for example G7 to C) - when you hit it you know that you've gone from the point of maximum instability/tension to the point of ultimate resolution -- the home point. Something similar happens when you hit an expected perfect end rhyme -- you get the feeling that you are home, BUT it also stops momentum. This does not occur to the same extent with near rhymes.

What is the purpose/effect of rhyme schemes? It is probably a mistake to try to analyze rhyme schemes on the written page. The presence (or strength) of the rhyme scheme is the

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degree that this is perceived and expected by the listener. Rhyming every 15th line probably will not be noticed because of the constraints of listener memory. Perfect end rhyme on every line will certainly be noticed, expected, and probably perceived as annoying. By making the rhyme less apparent, "perfect," or obvious, listener expectations are diminished. Other techniques to make the rhyme less obvious includes decreasing the length of time that the rhymed sound lasts and enjambment -- continuing the sentence beyond the end of the line. As rhymes are less expected they fulfill more of a role of just adding acoustic resonance to the piece.

One of our constant concerns is whether our writing follows the "rules of good songwriting" or whether we are being completely unoriginal. My intention in this column is to get you to think about what the rules mean, especially on the use of language in order to come up with original, refreshing lyrics that still fit within the proper framework for appealing songs. Again, the goal here is to get you to think about *WHY* we're doing things.

Happy holidays and songwriting! - Ron

Ron Tintner has been a member of the HFBSA since 2005. He has been playing music (primarily keyboards and guitars) for 40+ years (but hides it well). In real life, he is a neurologist and involved in research on music and the brain.

BOARD NOTES

By Bob Yoh

The Critiquemeister

Jerry Weatherton has decided to step down as the Critique-Meister. He has had that role for 10 years. He moved into that job one day when the previous session leader didn't show up and Jerry happened to have a tape player in his car. Jerry is one of the few links to the old Dave Davison/Monty West/Joe Kirkpatrick FBSA days when the group met down in Richmond. Those of us who have substituted for him during the critique sessions, on that rare occasion that he is gone, still try to figure out how he keeps the process moving, while leading the discussions, all the while taking enough notes to write the follow up critiques. To Jerry, many thanks from all of us!

He will still have plenty to do to keep him busy. Aside from his own writing, songs as well as prose, he has a first class studio at his house where he records his own and other's projects, supporting everyone from young fledgling bands up to the AARP generation. He teaches English in the Pearland ISD, breathing life into the antique English that is Beowulf. ("Was it not Scyld Shefing that shook the halls, took mead-benches, taught encroaching foes to fear him..."). Ah, mead benches, reminds me of the Hops House... But I digress...

Look for him sailing down on Galveston Bay and beyond with friends and family. And look for him on the other side of the critique table after the first of the year where he'll be able to weigh in on all of our songs for the first time in a long time.

Desert Island (or other remote site) Discs

This month: Andrew Richardson

Liner notes is starting a new feature. We'll have one or more of our members give examples of music/songs that are especially meaningful to them and some examples of why. This has multiple purposes. First and foremost is a desire to get everyone familiar with our current members, especially with regards to their tastes and opinions about music. Secondly, it's always interesting to discover new musical gems that you may not have heard of or appreciated. First batter up is Andrew Richardson, who is familiar to all meeting goers as the British lad who always has very pertinent and pithy comments about the songs. I must also add that Andrew is a moderator on the Muses Muse web forum which is really an excellent site for information about songwriting and another opportunity to get and give critiques. I can vouch from many hours and pages of discussion with Andrew, that he is a very knowledgeable and resourceful resource about songwriting. Check out his info on the HFBSA website members' section

—Ron Tintner

"CD's I would take to a desert island"

- Pink Floyd - Dark Side Of the moon (1973) - One of those "soundtrack to life" CDs - I grew up with it playing on my older brother's record player, and in a way that can only happen with music, it takes me right back.
- Meat Loaf - Bat out of hell (1977) - I have listened to this album so many times I know every note and every aspect of it - but I still like it - the sign of a great CD (and its album sales support my theory!)
- Rush - Signals (1982) - Rush is probably my favourite band, and although this one is not considered their best, for me it is the perfect marriage of ideas, instrumental skill and songwriting (what! A three-way marriage!!)
- Crash Test Dummies - God Shuffled His Feet (1993) - One of the quirkiest and original albums I have ever heard, but backed up with really good songwriting and ideas, which has kept me going back to it again and again
- 3rd Eye Blind - 3rd Eye Blind (1997) - Indie-Pop-rock- I got this album when it first came out, and it still sounds just as fresh and excellent as it did after the first few listens, whereas so many other bands of the same time period have faded away. There's a real depth to it behind some very catchy songs.

Nada Surf - Let Go (2002) - Nada Surf are another of my favourite bands - I have loved them from their first album onwards. This is the most mature and moving of their albums. I have often likened them to the Beach Boys, and I was delighted to see that Rolling Stone found the same comparison!!

If you haven't heard all or any of these albums, they are all superb!!

"CD's I'm listening to right now"

- Micheal Haaga - The plus minus show (2004) - local artist!
- Radiohead - the bends (1995) - I can't believe how long I have been missing out on this group
- Rendezvous - "Music for intimate dining" (2005) - I got this in Bed Bath And Beyond, from one of their "listening bays"- its jazz "standards" but I love it!!
- Also, HFBSA's very own - Ron Tintner's CD (2006?) - Another local artist!!!!

"Obscure musicians you have to check out"

For most of the last 8 years, I have bought very few albums, and instead I have spent hours and hours on www.soundclick.com, listening to obscure artists, gathering up (ie downloading) the best songs I can find. I have downloaded thousands.

For my absolute favourites from the masses, have a listen to my "radio station" at Soundclick- bear in mind that these are people like you and me!!

<http://www.soundclick.com/stations/stations.cfm?id=99413>

WE'RE ON THE WEB!
WWW.HFBSA.ORG



Liner Notes is the bimonthly newsletter of the Houston Fort Bend Songwriters Association.

Editor Dave Bannen More HFBSA information on the web.
Staff Bill Aspinwall
Ron Tintner

Listen up!!

Hey songsters – remember that the winning songs each month can be heard online in the members area of our fabulous Web site -- www.hfbsa.org. If you don't have your user name and password, please write Tony at hfbsa@katrose.com.

SONG SUBMISSIONS

by Jerry Weatherton

September 2006 Meeting

<http://www.katrose.com/HFBSA/datafile/critiques/0609.html>

Patti Guyer – Can't Touch

Andrew Richardson – The Sea

Patricia Bishop & Mike Darnell – That Ain't No Way

Tony Rose – Pass Me By

Ron Tintner & Patricia Bishop – County Line Road

Gary Taylor – Out on the London Road

Bob Pine – Cherish You Forever

Van Buchanan – He Doesn't Know You

Dave Bannen – Straight A's in Love

Larry Sepulvado – Working Man's Wife

October 2006 Meeting

<http://www.katrose.com/HFBSA/datafile/critiques/0610.html>

Mike Darnell – Man in the Moon

Larry Sepulvado – Some Hearts Get All the Breaks

Andrew Richardson – A Single Summer

Patricia Bishop – Grandpa's Picture

Patti Guyer & Chris Stiteler – Losing You

Lisa Loftin – Come Home Christmas Eve

Stan Hatch – Extra Special Bitter Blues

Tony Rose – Images of Loving

Bruce Scism & Gary Best – Guide Me Home

November 2006 Meeting

<http://www.katrose.com/HFBSA/datafile/critiques/0611.html>

Ron Tintner – Chat Site Girl

Mike Darnell – Can't Stop Now

Mike Ator – Unfamiliar Faces

Lisa Loftin, Peggy & Patti Guyer – We Are the Girls

Patti Guyer – Your Song

Jerry Weatherton – You Pull Me In

Bob Boelsche – Making Peace Out of Loving You

Danny Liggett – Everything's Broken

Andrew Richardson – Touchy Feely

Dave Bannen – My Forever

Larry Sepulvado – Double-deep & Double-wide

Dorian Harrison & Lloyd Cox – Rain

* winners are marked in bold