



Notes from Celtistan (2007)

Liner Notes

Benjy Wertheimer and Michael Mandrell

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Postcards from the Edge of Musical Innovation

All travelers through distant lands return with elements of those lands' richness inside — later integrated into the creation of new richness at home. As musical and spiritual travelers, Michael & Benjy have taken this journey to create the new land of Celtistan. The beautiful musical landscape there reverently merges Michael's Celtic and jazz sensibilities with Benjy's love of Indian classical music, giving the ancient traditions of India and Ireland a new melodic voice (with occasional touches of Asia and Bosnia). Celtistan's flowing and vibrant language was captured live, to preserve the unique richness, openness and spontaneity that shared moments bring.

Michael & Benjy have shared the depth and beauty of these moments since 1999, when it was clear from their first meeting that their synergy would take them and their audience to new acoustic lands.

Welcome to Celtistan.

- Eric Alan, Music Director
Jefferson Public Radio • Ashland, Oregon
Author/Photographer, "Wild Grace: Nature as a Spiritual Path"

Tracks

1. Iberian Nocturne
2. Shining Child
3. Sneakin' Out
4. Banish Misfortune
5. Bhagavan Dude
6. Bhairavi
7. Waltz from the White Mountains
8. Montuno
9. Turkish Coffee
10. Road Dogs (Guitar-Tabla Improv)
11. Dreaming the Beloved
12. Touch of the Beloved
13. What Was the Question?

Track 1 - "Iberian Nocturne" (Mandrell)

Inspired by traveling through medieval style villages in the Pyrenees mountains, this spirited piece is influenced by the melding of Spanish, French Celtic, and Arabesque modalities.

Track 2 - "Shining Child" (Mandrell)

A simple and playful guitar and tabla duet evocative of fond childhood memories.

Track 3 – “Sneakin’ Out” (Wertheimer & Mandrell)

Created on the spot in the recording studio in between takes, a true example of the creative spirit working in the moment.

Track 4 – “Banish Misfortune” (traditional)

A traditional Irish fiddle tune - from the Celtic side of things, played Benjy and Michael style.

Track 5 – “Bhagavan Dude” (Mandrell)

Recorded live, this celebration of the tabla is a tribute to all the intrepid musician travelers who wander the world's musical byways in search of a little slice of life.

Track 6 – “Bhairavi” (Wertheimer)

Track 7 – “Waltz from the White Mountains” (Mandrell)

With an intro featuring the traditional Indian raga, Bhairavi, on the esraj, the second piece of this medley was inspired by Michael's visit to the Hemlock Forest of the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

Track 8 – “Montuno” (Mandrell)

A whimsical and danceable play on a classic familiar Latin theme.

Track 9 – “Turkish Coffee” (Wertheimer & Mandrell)

A hyper-caffeinated frame drum improvisation by Benjy with Michael hanging on the best he can.

Track 10 – “Road Dogs” (Wertheimer & Mandrell)

A rollicking version of a classic Michael & Benjy improvisational jam.

Track 11 – “Dreaming the Beloved” (Wertheimer)

Track 12 – “Touch of the Beloved” (Wertheimer & Mandrell)

Carrying on the legacy of their yoga/meditation album, “Anjali,” this beautiful classical Indian raga finds new breath with Benjy leading on the esraj.

Track 13 – “What was the Question?” (Wertheimer)

This song is dedicated to Bosnian cellist Vedran Smailović, who played his cello on the square for 22 days to honor 22 people killed by Serbian forces while waiting in line for food and supplies ... even as snipers shot at passersby, mortar rounds fell, and machine gun battles raged nearby. In so doing, he made one of the most powerful possible protests, pointing out the craziness of the war surrounding him.

The song features a form of polytonal “throat singing” in which the vocalist produces two or more notes at the same time.

“What Was the Question?”

Beads of pouring rain
Shatter on the asphalt as he bends
To pick up one more can
Looking back again
His soaked and tattered clothes
make me feel pity
Pity for this man
I’m looking on as if I knew
the answers
With my house, my car,
my American dreams
The look in his eyes tells me
he’s on to something
He knows
So much more than it seems

What was the question again
Just when I thought
I knew the answers
What was the question again
That’s the most important
question of them all

Blood and flesh and bone
Spattered on the asphalt
where he plays
On Sarajevo stage

The cellist just plays on
In his opera concert coattails
and conducting
This symphony of rage

Smailović Vedran is his name
The soldiers know
that he must be insane
Taking up arms
is the name of the game
But he questions
Who made the rules?

Šta je pitanje
Hero moje
What was the question, my hero

Šta je pitanje
Pitamo
What was the question, we ask

Šta je pitanje
Molimo Boze
*What was the question,
we pray to God*

Šta je pitanje
Pitamo
What was the question, we ask

Thank You

There is simply not enough room on a CD jacket to thank all of those who have helped this project come to life, but we would particularly like to thank the following people:

Frank Stearns, Dean Baskerville, and Dave Friedlander for their help in recording and mixing; Heather Wertheimer for sharing her angelic voice and her loving support; Benjy's teachers Ali Akbar Khan and Zakir Hussain, whose musical mastery and patient guidance through the world of Indian classical music is a gift beyond measure.

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Musicians and Artists

Michael Mandrel: 6-string guitar

Benjy Wertheimer: Esraj, tabla, percussion, vocals, tamboura, keyboards, and harmonic singing

Michael Stirling: Tamboura

Heather Wertheimer: Background vocals on "What Was the Question?"

Produced by Benjy Wertheimer and Michael Mandrell

"Bhagavan Dude" and "What Was the Question?" recorded live in concert July 15, 2005, at the Dancing Trees Sanctuary, Newberg, OR by Frank Stearns

All other selections recorded by Dave Friedlander (cuts 1, 2, 3, 6-8) and Dean Baskerville (cuts 4, 9-12) at Kung Fu Bakery, Portland, OR

Mixed by Benjy Wertheimer, Michael Mandrell, Frank Stearns and Dean Baskerville at Kung Fu Bakery and Supernatural Sound, Portland, OR

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Photos of Michael & Benjy by Douglas Byers

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Back cover photo of Benjy: Magic Glass

Back cover photo of Michael by Janice Rubin