

Peter's Power Pop



A bit of this, a bit of that – and a lot of music

RECENT COMMENTS

TAGS

- 100 Proof Aged in Soul (1)
- 10cc (15)
- 16 Frames (1)
- 1920s (3)
- 1927 [the band not the year] (1)
- 1930s (6)
- 1940s (4)
- 1950s (44)
- 1960s (332)
- 1970s (521)
- 1980s (383)
- 1990s (239)
- 2000s (792)
- 38 Special (1)
- 3OH3 (1)
- 4 Non Blondes (1)
- 45s (1)
- 5th Dimension (1)
- 78 Saab (4)
- 801 (1)
- A Fragile Tomorrow (1)
- ABBA (10)
- ABC (1)
- Abingdon Boys School (1)
- AC/DC (7)
- Adam Faith (1)
- Adam Schmitt (1)
- Adele (1)
- Adrian Legg (1)
- Adrian Whitehead (3)
- Aerovons (8)
- After The Fire (2)
- Afternoons (4)
- Agony Aunts (2)
- Ai Otsuka (2)
- Air Supply (2)
- Al Caiola and his Orchestra (1)
- Al Caiola and Riz Orlolani (1)
- Al Dexter (1)
- Al Di Meola (1)
- Al Green (1)
- Al Hiirt (1)
- Al Jolson (1)
- Alan Moorhouse and his Bond Street Brigade (1)
- Alan Parsons Project (1)
- Albert Ammons (1)
- Albert Hammond (1)
- Alejandra O'Leary (1)
- Alejandro Rivera (1)
- Alex Chilton (1)
- Alex Lloyd (1)
- Alice Cooper (2)
- Aliens (1)
- Alison McCallum (1)
- Alive And Kicking (1)
- All Eyes West (1)
- Allusions (1)
- Alphabeat (1)
- Alternativa (1)
- Amen Corner (1)
- America (3)
- Amy Findlay (1)
- Amy Heffernan (1)
- Amy Rigby (1)
- An American Underdog (1)
- Andrew Gold (2)
- Andrews Sisters (1)
- Andy Kim (2)
- Andy Partridge (1)
- Andy Reed (1)
- Andy Taylor (1)
- Andy Williams (2)
- Angel City (1)
- Angels (6)
- Animal Logic (2)
- Anodyne 500 (1)
- Any Trouble (2)
- Apollo 100 (1)
- Apple Jam (3)
- Apples In Stereo (1)
- Applesseed (1)
- April Wine (1)
- Aqua (1)
- Arcade Fire (1)
- Ariana Grande (1)
- Ariel (1)
- Ario (1)
- Ario Guthrie (1)
- Ashton Gardner and Dyke (1)
- Asia (1)
- Association (4)
- Astrud Gilberto (1)
- Athletes In Paris (5)
- Atomic Numbers (1)
- Attractions (3)
- Austin and Ally (1)
- Austin Roberts (1)
- Australian Crawl (4)
- Autopilot (2)
- Autumn (1)
- Avril Lavigne (1)
- Axiom (3)
- Axis Of Awesome (1)
- Ayers Rock (1)
- Ayumi Hamasaki (2)
- B-52's (1)
- B. Bumble and the Stingers (1)
- Baby Screem (1)
- Babys (1)
- Bachman-Turner Overdrive (1)
- Badfinger (5)
- Bailter Space (1)
- Baja Marimba Band (1)
- Balance (1)
- Ball Park Music (1)
- Ballard (1)
- Bamboo (1)
- Banana Splits (1)
- Bandana Splits (1)
- Bar-Kays (1)
- Bardot (1)
- Barenaked Ladies (1)
- Barry And The Tamerlanes (1)
- Barry Crocker (1)
- Barry Green (1)
- Barry Manilow (1)
- Barry Morgan (1)
- Barry Ryan (1)
- Barry St. John (1)
- Basia (1)
- Bay City Union (1)
- Be-Bop Deluxe (1)
- Beach Boys (9)
- Beat (1)
- Beethoven (3)
- Beatles (71)
- Beatnix (2)
- Beaut (1)
- Bee Gees (3)
- Bees (1)
- Ben Folds Five (2)
- Ben Lee (1)
- Ben Mason (1)
- Ben Sollee (1)
- Ben's Brother (1)
- Benjamin Towers (1)
- Berlin (1)
- Bernard Purdie (1)
- Bert Kaempfert (2)
- Bertolf (1)
- Bette Midler (1)
- Better Days (1)
- Beverly Hills (1)
- Beverly Bremers (1)
- Beyond Veronica (1)
- Bic Runga (1)
- Big Audio Dynamite (1)
- Big Country (1)
- Big Daddy (1)
- Big Dadd (1)
- Big Eyes (1)
- Big Star (3)
- Big Town Boys (1)
- Bill Haley and His Comets (1)
- Bill Lloyd (1)
- Billy Bragg (1)
- Billy Bremner (1)
- Billy Cobham (1)
- Billy Field (1)
- Billy Goodrum (1)
- Billy Idol (1)
- Billy J Kramer (1)
- Billy J Kramer with The Dakotas (3)
- Billy Joe Royal (1)
- Billy Joel (1)
- Billy May (1)
- Billy Nicholls (1)
- Billy Satellite (1)
- Billy Swan (1)
- Billy Thorpe (2)
- Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs (3)

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2013

Song of the day: Secret Friend - "Time Machine"



I was recently contacted by Steven Fox, a charming young Australian fellow who has made an album featuring an awful lot of American power pop musicians. He called this ~~project conglomeration ragtag bunch of neo-do-wells~~ band *Secret Friend*, and the album is *Time Machine*.

I've listened to the album a few times now (is seven a few?), and enjoyed it every time.

Instead of pestering each song individually, I'll offer a short-ish review of the album that will consist of positives and negatives.

In the positive camp:

- Time Machine* will appeal to people who grew up with the music of the 1970s. (I grew up listening to the music of the 70s, and that's probably why I found the album so appealing.)
- It's an album that sounds like an album – that is, it's a unified 50 minutes of music. (I love albums that reside in their own soundworld. For me, albums like *Kate Bush's Lionheart*, *Field Music's Tones Of Town*, or *Charlotte Hatherley's Grey Will Fade*, to give three wildly disparate examples, all have their own "mood" that last for the length of time you're listening to them.)
- It's well-produced.
- I like it.

And in the negative camp:

- If I had one criticism, it'd be this: *Time Machine* sounds to me like an album full of verses. There isn't any song on it I can think of that has the kind of chorus that leaps out of the song and makes you shout "That's a great chorus!"
- I can only think of one negative (see above).
- Oh, I just thought of another. Some of the orchestral instruments aren't terribly well recorded. They occasionally sound like MIDI instruments more than real-live oboes, cellos etc.

And now for the album:

Secret Friend - *Time Machine* (2012)



Time Machine
Secret Friend



Buy Share

1. Who Am I? 03:51
2. Something About the Girl 03:59
3. Starting Today 03:18
4. Never Before 04:58
5. Time Machine 05:24
6. Oblivious 04:17
7. Killing Time 04:01
8. He'll Never Know Me 04:27
9. I Don't Want to Count You Out 03:25
10. The Elephant in the Room 03:12
11. Another Love Affair 03:36
12. Without My Pr0n 05:44

It's usually at this part of a blog post that I comment on each song individually, but I won't do that here.

One reason is that I hear the album as one entity, not a bunch of songs (even though it is technically a bunch of songs – but you know what I mean). I wouldn't want to single out any particular song(s) for some reason (usually trivial). Another is that this post is already long enough.

Oops. It's occurred to me that I hadn't talked about Steven and how, as an Australian, he came to be in America recording an album with a bunch of Americans.

So this post is about to get longer. (Sorry about that.)

Rather than me writing ineptly about Steven's Stateside Saga™, how about I let Steven do the talking via his (slightly edited by me) press release?

Australian artist Secret Friend release their Los Angeles recorded debut album today

Sydney, Australia (9 January 2013) — Sydney-based Secret Friend today has launched their debut album *Time Machine*, available now on CD, iTunes, Amazon and other major online services.

Recorded last year in Los Angeles California, *Time Machine* is the unique pairing of Australian songwriter, Steven Fox, with acclaimed American producer Linus of Hollywood. The result is 12 exceptionally crafted and original pop songs which might have been found on a lost Wings or Nilsson album.

Many notable LA musicians lent their talents to the recording, including:

- Willie Wisely and Kelly Jones on vocals;
- Bob Remstein** (Mello Cads), **Ben Romans** (The Click Five), and Roger Joseph Manning Jr. (Jellyfish, Beck) on keyboards;
- Carson Cohen** on bass guitar;
- Reade Pryor** on drums and percussion; and
- Linus of Hollywood** on guitars.

John Hill (producer of Margo Guryan's classic 1968 album *Take a Picture*) contributed orchestral arrangements on several tracks.

Songwriter Steven Fox wears his musical influences on his sleeve. "I'm definitely a child of 1970's American AM radio, that's what I grew up listening to. But when it came to writing and recording this album, I totally rejected the idea of copying other artists using specific instrumentation or obvious chord changes or arrangements. It's really tempting, and fun, to evoke a special sound heard on, say, "God Only Knows" or "Mr. Blue Sky", but I chose not to go that route because I would find that very limiting as an artist, ultimately. I decided to use contemporary sounds and production, maybe also combine a couple different musical styles in one song, and then try to make each song on the album unique in its own right as well. Having said that, we recorded all the rhythm tracks live, just like it was done back in the day. The groove is just so much tighter than laying down each part separately. Even if it's only on a subconscious level, the listener can feel that. And although we used *ProTools* for recording, we didn't do excessive editing or alterations. Sometimes it took me 20 or more takes to sing just one small vocal part on pitch, but I'd rather do that than *Auto-Tune* it. That certainly was a test of patience for Linus, but I think he would agree the end result was worth it."

Lyricaly, *Time Machine* explores a lot ground – from lost love to vehicular homicide, from time travel to compulsive masturbation, from first degree murder to living on the moon. With such topics it would be hard to consider this as an auto-biographical album, "But there are actually a couple personal songs on the album. One of them is 'The Elephant in the Room' which is about a happily married couple getting on in years but still behaving like they did when they first married – meanwhile their friends are raising kids and begin to distance themselves from that younger lifestyle. That's absolutely what my wife and I have experienced. Another one is 'Oblivious' which I wrote for my wife's birthday quite a few years ago. When I first played it to her, her immediate reaction was, "So that's what you've been doing?? Why haven't you been looking for a job??" She was right, of course, but that really stung. So I immediately found a new job and totally gave up on music. I didn't even pick up a guitar for 5 years. She eventually started encouraging me to pursue music again, and even gave me the green light to quit my old job and record this album."

About Steven Fox:

Steven Fox is a complete newcomer to the music industry, having spent his entire adult life as an entrepreneur in advertising and information technology. He worked in Asia for nearly 20 years and learned Mandarin by listening to Chinese pop songs. "Songwriting has been something I have been doing since I was a teenager in my high school band, but then I never seriously pursued it because I made a decision that I would follow a very different career. I would often write music at home after work, and it was always in the back of the mind that one day I might get around to seriously pursuing my music and recording some of my songs."

Due to a fortunate set of circumstances Steven found himself living in Hollywood for six months in 2012 and recorded this album. "I got a pretty late start at it, but I think I bring a level of maturity to my songwriting which I hope others will appreciate."

Links:

Official website
[Time Machine Album Video Sampler](#)
Official Music Video for "Without My Pr0n"
[iTunes](#)
[Facebook](#)
[Stream Time Machine on SoundCloud](#)
[Bandcamp](#)

Posted by Peter at 6:00 AM Recommend this on Google

Labels: 2000s, Secret Friend, Song of the day

Reactions: ☐ More please (0) ☐ Enjoyable-ish (0) ☐ Fair (0) ☐ Moderately awful (0) ☐ What were you thinking? (0)

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ABOUT ME



Peter

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18 minutes ago

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1 hour ago

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11 hours ago

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2 days ago

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Zombie Music
4 days ago

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David Myhr - Bonus Tracks and Covers
1 week ago

The Pure Pop Pub
The Pure Pop Pub's Top 15 For 2012
3 weeks ago

Big Plans For Everybody
From Vegas to...Stourbridge...?
4 weeks ago

BLOG ARCHIVE

- ▼ 2013 (48)
- ▼ February (5)
- Song of the day: Secret Friend - "Time Machine"
- Educating Peter # 33
- Song of the day: DaFinals - "Don't You Grow Walken..."
- Song of the day: Gavin Guss - "Riga In The Fall"
- Song of the day: KOOS - "Feel Alright"
- January (43)

► 2012 (592)

► 2011 (481)

► 2010 (443)

► 2009 (289)