

Reluctant Pilgrim and Uncharted Territory

Reluctant Pilgrim and *Uncharted Territory* are recordings of songs by Stephen Schwartz, performed by Stephen Schwartz.

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Reluctant Pilgrim: Peggy's Plug!

Question/Comment:

Hi, all. I just received "Reluctant Pilgrim" today, and it's great! I imagine you all already have a copy and know how good it is, but if there's someone who hasn't gotten a copy yet, you really need to get one. Since my screen reader only reads non-graphical text, I didn't realize that all the samples of songs on the website were from RP, so it was like meeting old friends, only better, since I could hear the whole song. I have a question for Mr. Schwartz, when he returns from Germany or wherever he is: I'm wondering how you pick the themes for your songs. Are they from personal experience or observations (with the exception of "Prestidigitation") or what? The themes are wonderful, and there's a lot of material for reflection in them. Okay, now I've given my plug, so I'll go back into lurk mode.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Peggy: How could I not reply to your message immediately, with such a lovely plug for the "Reluctant Pilgrim" CD? (I hasten to assure other readers of the bulletin board that I did not write Peggy's letter myself.) In answer to your question: The themes on this particular album are indeed, as you suspected, based on my own experiences, plus I suppose, a little on observations of the experiences of my close friends. That was my goal in writing songs not intended for characters in a show or movie. Even in the case of "Prestidigitation", the song sort of came to me in a dream (a corny thing to say, I know, but true nevertheless) and I think was a consequence of my having been held-up at knife-point in New York City during the 70's. I guess the other two exceptions on the album are "More Than This", which is a lyric written by my close friend Dean Pitchford, though it certainly expresses an emotion I've often felt if not in its specifics, and "The Hardest Part of Love", which IS from a show (CHILDREN OF EDEN), but which I included because the song is so personal I might as well have written it directly from experience. Hope this answers your question, and thank you again so much for writing with such enthusiasm. Best, Stephen Schwartz

Reluctant Pilgrim/The Stories Behind the Songs

Question:

I really love "Reluctant Pilgrim" and I'm wondering if you could share the stories behind the songs. What inspired you to write about these topics, how you got together with Dean Pitchford for "More Than This," and so on.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Thank you for writing. I'm glad you're enjoying "Reluctant Pilgrim." I originally began to write the songs that make up most of the CD in response to a "challenge" from a songwriter friend of mine, John Bucchino. I had been encouraging John (who had always written individual and highly personal songs) to write for the theatre, and he in turned asked why I never wrote individual songs based on my own life. He said it was time to stop "hiding behind Hunchbacks and Indian princesses." So I decided to try.

The first song I wrote was "Life Goes On." This was an attempt to deal with my feelings after a close friend of mine died of AIDS. Writing the song turned out to be very therapeutic for me. Other songs followed, based on my personal relationships or those of my close friends. Of course one always changes the details slightly, in the same way a novelist will, in order to make for a more dramatic story or funnier observation, or sometimes just for a better rhyme! (For instance, in "Life Goes On", my friend's memorial service was actually in June, not May, and the party I was headed back for was a big graduation party at a friend's house, not a barbecue at mine ... that kind of thing.)

Sometimes ideas I was musing about would come together in serendipitous ways -- for instance, I was thinking about doing a song about what I had been observing about futilely dating in the 90's, and I had the line: "Everyone I know wants to be in love with someone/just not with someone they know". But I didn't have a focus for the song. Then one day I was playing a song for Jeffrey Katzenberg while he was staying at a hotel in New York, and his suite was very high up with a great view of Manhattan. I was looking down at all the people scurrying busily around below when Peter Schneider, the president of Disney animation, came up and said, "It really is a crowded little island, isn't it?" So I knew to call the song "Crowded Island" and set it in Manhattan. This is how these things happen!

Sometimes I don't know where a song comes from. I more or less woke up one morning with "Prestidigitation" in my head. I know that the emotion of the song was based on the memory of being held up at knife point in New York City many years ago. And I guess while I slept, my unconscious combined it with my love of magic and of little "Twilight Zone" type of stories. The name Mario came from remembering a Thomas Mann story called "Mario and the Magician." And so on. The unconscious works in weird ways, and all one can do is follow it.

As for writing "More Than This" with Dean Pitchford: Dean has been a close friend of mine for many years, since when he was an actor and was the first understudy in GODSPELL (He subsequently went on to play Pippin as well before he wised up and became a highly successful writer.) We had actually written "More Than This" together, just for fun, several years ago. The song hadn't quite come together at that point, but there were things about it I had always liked. So I when I was looking for the final songs for the CD, I went to Dean and asked him if he would be willing to rewrite some of the lyric. He agreed, and with his usual skill, came up with something I was completely happy with, and lo and behold, we had a new song. All the best, Stephen Schwartz

Reluctant Pilgrim: Songs from Shows?

Question:

Are any of the songs on Reluctant Pilgrim (with the exception of the song from Children of Eden) ideas from a full length show? They all seem so personal.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Besides "The Hardest Part of Love" from CHILDREN OF EDEN, which I included because it is a very personal song despite being from a show, the only other song on the RELUCTANT PILGRIM CD which can be said to have been written with a show in mind is "Snapshots", which I wrote as the opening number for a revue of my work that was being put together. I included it because it is also a personal statement. The idea of doing a CD like RELUCTANT PILGRIM arose when a songwriter friend of mine, John Bucchino, challenged me to write songs NOT from shows, but based on personal experiences and observations, as he does. I had never really done that before, since up to that time I had always hidden behind the characters in my shows. The only other exception on the album, I suppose, is the song "More Than This,"

which has a lyric by my friend Dean Pitchford and is obviously about a character who is neither Dean nor myself. Nevertheless, there was something about the emotion of the song, if not the specifics, that made it feel personal enough for me to include it. Thanks for asking. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Reluctant Pilgrim: What Influenced Dreamscape?

Question:

I'm wondering what influenced the song "Dreamscape" from "Reluctant Pilgrim". The words are absolutely wonderful, and I found myself thinking about them all day today (probably because I'm one of those reluctant pilgrims who's standing at the threshold, ready to step into a new experience). I'd like to hear what SS had in his mind/heart when he composed it. It's a wonderful song!

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Peggy: The song "Dreamscape" was written at a time when I was re-examining many of the choices I had made in my life and trying to find the courage to make some major changes. I have since done so and it has brought me far more serenity than I would have imagined. I realize that we all go through these struggles at certain points in our lives, and so it is a fairly mundane subject I suppose. So I tried to make the imagery of the song poetic enough to lift it out of the commonplace. I'm glad to hear that it worked for you, and I wish you the best with your own struggles and choices. All the best, Stephen Schwartz

"So Far"/"Cactus Flowers"

Question:

In my latest listenings to "Reluctant Pilgrim" I've been struck with what wonderfully positive and upbeat songs "So Far" and "Cactus Flowers" are. I've always liked them, and am becoming more impressed with them all the time. I told my husband I thought of our 15 years of marriage when listening to "So Far". Unfortunately, I think I said it right as you were singing "little betrayals and lies and a part of us dies", which got him a little worried. But I think once he heard the whole song, he understood what I meant. "Battered but strong like a kid's first car" has me a bit worried though, as our daughter will be driving in three years. And "Cactus Flowers", with its talk of second chances and the happy and hopeful sound of the music, is a fantastic way to end the CD! It leaves me wanting to hear more and wishing it were a double CD. If sharing anything about these songs is too personal, I'll certainly understand, but I just had to say how great I think they are.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Peggy: Thanks as always. I guess I am a relatively positive person, but with a recognition of the mistakes, regrets, and dark times that are a part of all our lives and all our relationships. Thanks also for your remark about the double CD. I have just begun recently to think about material for a second CD. It's probably a year away, what with other commitments and the slow pace at which I tended to work on "Reluctant Pilgrim", but I foresee that eventually there will be a second one, which I hope will interest you as much as "Reluctant Pilgrim" has. Best, Stephen Schwartz

Your Personal Songs

Question:

Hi, Stephen. While listening to the RELUCTANT PILGRIM CD yesterday, I started wondering about how you decided what would be on it. I know the CD came about because a friend of yours challenged you not to hide behind characters in a show and to record some of your personal songs. So I get the impression that, since obviously the songs weren't written with recording in mind, that sometimes you just write songs as a type of musical journal for yourself, a way to express what you're feeling and

perhaps to process ideas or experiences, etc. Is this true? And if so, I'm wondering if you had to choose from a large selection of your personal songs the ones that would be included on the CD. If that's the case, I'm wondering how you went about making that decision. It's obvious from listening to the songs, that they're very personal, and it must have felt like I might feel in looking through my journal and trying to decide what to have published in a national magazine (shudder). So what kinds of things did you consider in deciding what to share with your listeners? Did you look for songs that expressed feelings and experiences that would probably be common to the largest number of people? Did you choose them to be inspiring/encouraging to others, such as "Dreamscape" (which has become my theme song)? And speaking of "Dreamscape", was the last chorus, where you change from just talking to yourself as a reluctant pilgrim and invite other reluctant pilgrims to sail, in the original version, or was that something that was added once you decided to record the song? I hope these questions about such personal songs aren't too personal; if they are, I'll certainly understand. But I'd be interested in hearing whatever you feel comfortable sharing about the process of taking something that's such a personal part of you and sharing it with us. I can hardly wait for your next CD! Any idea when it might be out? - Peggy

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Peggy: Thanks. Actually, I don't tend to write personal songs just for myself, at least I haven't for a great many years. The songs for "Reluctant Pilgrim" stemmed from my discussions with my friend, John Bucchino. Once I decided to act on his suggestion that I write songs from my own life experiences and observations, I knew I was ultimately going to release them, for others to sing or for my own CD. So I always knew that others would be hearing them and, I guess, this kept me from getting so personal that I would have been embarrassed to have them heard publically. But as you can hear from the songs, I don't hold too much back! In terms of "Dreamscape", it was always written with the first person plural final chorus. (When I do it in concert now, I actually do a third final chorus which is sung a capella with just the rhythm playing, and that's first person plural too.) Thanks as always for your interest. Sincerely, Stephen

Uncharted Territory

Question:

I bought your Uncharted Territory CD last year after watching you perform and had enjoyed listening to some of the songs at the time, then put the cd away. I recently bought a new iPod MP3 player big enough to put everything on it and included your songs - and I have to say I really enjoy that album so much that I find myself playing this album everywhere. I can't even place why. I often find myself thinking especially about Worth Waiting For, Line Forms to the Right, Forgiveness Embrace... I could go on, but I just wanted to let you know that a year after first hearing, I'm still enjoying these songs.

Secondly, I noticed an artist -- is it Mary Fahl-- also recorded Recurring Dream, and used one of the lines from it in her album title (The Other Side of Time). In fact I recognized it as the same song due to that one lyric. The haunting song sounds even more chilling sung by her - did you write this for her, together, or did she just do an interesting cover? Thanks, Tony G.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Tony: I forwarded your kind words about Uncharted Territory along to Stephen - he has had very little time to respond to posts of late as he is incredibly busy with WICKED...Anyhow, in answer to your question about Mary Fahl - she collaborated on Recurring Dream/The Other Side of Time with Stephen. She preferred the other title, not sure why! They both worked on music and lyrics, which is why the credit on the album says "by Mary Fahl and Stephen Schwartz" Best, Michael

Boy on the Roof

Question:

I notice on your latest CD one of the songs is dedicated to Mario Frangoulis. I'm a big fan of Mario. I was wondering if your musical Captain Louie is also dedicated to Mario. It sounds so much like Mario's childhood. It would be wonderful if you could share some thoughts with Mario's fans... who like me are intrigued with this link to Mario.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz: Thank you for your message. Actually, CAPTAIN LOUIE was written well before I had ever met Mario -- it is derived from a children's picture book called "The Trip" by Ezra Jack Keats, and the show's first incarnation was at The First All-Children's Theatre back in the mid-80's. But I take it as an indication of the universality of Mr. Keats' story that it could also apply to Mario's childhood in Greece.

I first met Mario when he got in touch with me about the possibility of writing a song for him to sing. We met when he came to New York, and in telling me about himself and his early experiences in Athens, the idea for the song "Boy on the Roof" emerged. That's why the music and orchestration of the song, as it appears on my CD UNCHARTED TERRITORY, have what I hope is a little bit of a Greek flavor. It turned out that I recorded the song, but Mario did not wind up doing so. But it was definitely written for him and his remarkable voice -- to hear him hold out the long note on the last repeat of "love will change us" is really thrilling. I hope someday he will record it. And he and I did become friends, which was a positive side effect! Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

Code of Silence/Ten-Day Heartbreak

Question:

I have some more questions about "Reluctant Pilgrim" songs that I thought of while listening to it tonight. On "Code of Silence", I'm really impressed with the way the piano emphasizes the heartbreaking situation of the couple who live with their code of silence, and I'm wondering how SS composed it. If it's not too personal, it'd be interesting to know how you came up with the subject matter, but it would also be interesting to know how you made the words and music flow so well together. Did you just have the idea in your heart and sit down at the piano and start playing out the feeling, or did the words come first and the accompaniment proceed on a more analytical level, i.e. following the rules of music theory or whatever? My other question is regarding "Ten-day Heartbreak", which I find a refreshing relief from the usual break-up songs.

The thought of someone going from total devastation to being totally over the pain in ten days makes me smile every time I hear it. I'm just curious what you had in mind when you composed it. Is it a commentary on the superficial relationships that we seem to think are so vital to our happiness and which we only discover the superficiality of after they're over? What ever they're based on, "Code of Silence" and "Ten-day Heartbreak" are great songs which I don't think I've heard you comment on and would be curious to learn more about.

Answer from Stephen Schwartz:

Dear Peggy: These are tough questions for me to answer. One of the things about writing very personal songs is that you already feel very exposed in them. To go into more detail gets to be in the nature of a confessional. I think I'll save those details for my autobiography, to be published posthumously. I will tell you, to answer at least the technical side of your questions, that in the case of "Code of Silence", as far as I can remember, I had the idea for the song and some of the lyric content and then let music flow that seemed to come from the emotion I was feeling. Then I went back and tailored the lyrics to the music.

But it's always difficult for me to write about the process, or even to remember it accurately, because it is coming from such an unconscious place during the actual act of writing. In terms of "Ten Day Heartbreak", the idea was to write a funny angry but honest song about being dumped. (I WILL reveal that despite the title, it took longer than ten days to get over.) Thanks for asking, and please understand if I have been reluctant about going into more personal detail. I guess if I wanted to do that, I wouldn't be a songwriter, I'd go on Jerry Springer. Sincerely, Stephen Schwartz

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/reluctant-pilgrim.htm>

<http://www.musicalschwartz.com/uncharted-territory.htm>