
Turn By Turn

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The Life and Music, Thus Far, Of Art Garfunkel

"I sit here thinking of memories we knew
Life rushes by so fast
We all are blind, and we stumble through our days
As the future turns to past"
Private World
Artie Garr

The digits I had dialed traversed the six hundred miles or so from my home to Art Garfunkel's New York. The call was answered quickly by the friendly, warm voice of Art saying, "Hi J.T. Just let me close the door of my office... hang on." The candid and familiar tone set my nerves at ease, somewhat. The sound of silence was finally broken when he picked back up and said, "How do you feel today?" There was such an actual genuineness in his tone that all of my apprehensions faded quickly away.

Our conversation wended its way through politics, global warming, the environment, the disingenuousness within the recording business, apathy and the role of technology in making us even more apathetic. There were fascinating twists and turns, none of which were covered on my meticulously prepared list of questions. We did however get around to his current project, *Some Enchanted Evening* and the subsequent tour to support it. *Some Enchanted Evening* is an eclectic collection of Tin Pan Alley style songs by the likes of Johnny Mercer, Jimmy Dorsey and Rogers and Hammerstein, which is wholly engaging in its selection as well as its execution.

It was daunting to interview such an iconic figure, a man whose achievements ranged from a masters in mathematics to all of the songs, music, prose and poetry he has created. Were there other worlds that he has not able to conquer and things that he still wished to attain?

"I still haven't gotten to sing as good as I can, so the first thing your question makes me think is right down the mainstream, the middle of what I do. I'm a singer first and foremost. I can sing better than the world knows me to sing." he stated flatly, while in my mind, his soaring counter tenor rang through *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, and I found no flaws whatsoever. "I'm still in the process of getting my full act together, being maximally effective. I don't look outside of music when you ask me a question. ...I am a singer. Have I really done it all? No."

I disagreed with him, tactfully of course, telling him that the sheer silkiness of *Some Enchanted Evening* was just astounding. The selections from America's songbook, containing classics such as *I've Grown Accustomed To Her Face*, *Quiet Nights Of Quiet Stars (Corcovado)* and the album's namesake, *Some Enchanted Evening*, were all expertly arranged and the singing had such a melodious quality to it, you could feel the relaxed sense of release within him.

"I'm smiling because, you know, I'm quite pleased with it. I know you're not supposed to say this, but after a bunch of albums, I've been convinced to put the vocals way up front finally, very palatably...don't show off as a singer. Don't make them go, 'Look at the singing!' Just tickle their ears. Serve the listener aurally. So I'm trying to be a servant of delight in this album with the vocals way up front and I thought the phrasing came out good."

With his background in mathematics, I wondered if he ever saw the musical form as an elegant mathematical process.

"Well, I certainly see Bach and his fugues that way. I calibrate, very carefully with great precision...I am precise. When I'm singing, time and the exactness of rhythm and the solidity of the groove, something that *Creedence Clearwater* was so brilliant at, is just total, solid time. When you feel that solid time, the mathematician such as I, likes to play with it and surge just a little ahead, a little behind. The precision of the exactness, of feeling it, allows you to play games with it and you pull your listener into such a sensitivity when you play these games. Now you can grab the next word, and just a little ahead of the beat, and it has an effect, an urgency. Or, you slip back, the same thing you do with crescendos and decrescendos you do volume-wise, you do with little pushes and surges in the rhythm when you're just mathematically precise about what you do. But, maybe I'm just describing a musicians' precision."

Emerging onto the music scene, as well as becoming aware of the sheer breadth of the world, in a time of a convoluted evolution of political and social structure, Art Garfunkel has seen the seams of what holds America together. He has toured across the land, having walked across the country as well and has a keen sense of the changing landscape. How does he view the new technology and the inherent anonymity of the computer age, especially in deference to the changing face of the music industry?

"I very happy to say, I don't quite get it." he admitted without regret. "It's a moving target, it's shifting sands. I don't have to get it. All I have to do is sing. Can I find a venue to sing? It may not be the record business, but maybe it's only the stage."

"I like this motto. It's a very important guide to living, in my opinion. 'Never underestimate the massive quantity of human shyness.'" he said, pausing slightly before expounding on the statement. "People's ability to be shy is massive and it explains so much. The computer world feeds into people who don't want to be face to face with anybody, and that shyness, that living through your terminal at a distance, more detached from everybody, getting your entertainment with an increased amount of detachment it's about feeding into shyness. It's exactly what the community of the human race does not need. How to superficially pretend we're in touch with each other from a farther distance with more detachment."

"W.H. Auden has this little short poem, which tries to preach accepting for whatever is...'Try and embrace whatever's going because these are our lives and we love being alive/ Bless what there is for being/Which has to be obeyed, for/What else am I made for?/Agree or disagree?' Art finished with a flourish. "Short and sweet. That's what there is for me. If it's here,

if it makes up our world, try and embrace the whole funny, contradictory, ridiculous picture."

"It's a tough age. I'm not partaking of it. I'm proud to be old fashioned in many ways...I don't own a cell phone, I never got with computers. I don't own one. I don't know how they work. It's costing me." he stated, somewhat defiantly. "I have personnel to help me, but something tells me that I don't want to learn to communicate in a zippier way. These are the elements that make quality of life so I don't want to find shortcuts when it comes to the quality of life."

With the record industry circling their wagons to try and contain their self-inflicted, short sighted losses, it was apparent that this was a whole new species than the artist friendly record companies of the sixties and seventies. To see the progression from the organic structure where art was appreciated to the mechanical behemoth that manufactured music for the masses must be quite a sad scene indeed.

"I'm on the inside of the record business and I'm an artist and I can tell you that royalty statements and everything have gone...disappeared in the last year. The structure of the whole business and getting paid has gone somehow into somebody's sub-basement in some building and no one can find it. In other words, we lost our record business, we the artists have. The royalty payments, the structure, the whole way the business worked, it checked out in '07. So we're in a state of real vigilantism. Rules are gone...who is making up the new rules? What kind of grabbing is going on? These are the questions."

One of the questions I so dearly wanted to ask, but was afraid to, suddenly came up in conversation so I ventured forth. Was his upcoming tour going to include selections from the Simon and Garfunkel repertoire in its set list?

"I'll sing Kathy's Song near the end of the show." he said, much to my relief. "It's a beautiful, nostalgic love song. I like say it's Paul Simon's number one love song. I'll do some Simon and Garfunkel stuff because it's coy to leave it out and I'm an entertainer and I want to give the audience Scarborough Fair and I love doing these things." he proclaimed, quite animatedly. "I have orchestra charts that enhance them and it's not like I've done them thousands of times and am bored. I've done them a hundred times. That's enough to know how it goes and enough to enjoy it."

I glanced in panic at the clock. I was only supposed to have interviewed him for fifteen minutes and thirty-five had elapsed. My page of prepared questions had almost been wholly forgotten as I had gotten lost in conversation with one of the most prolific originators in modern memory. Too soon, our conversation ended with a poetical phrase that Art had said earlier, summing up not only the last half-hour, but the essence of our existence as well..."Our lives are love and a continual goodbye."

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