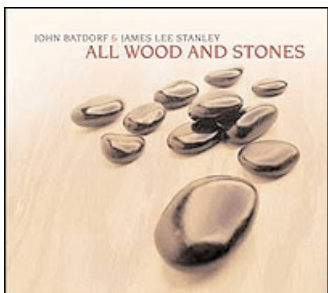




June 11, 2007

I won't go see the Stones anymore. I don't want to hang with those people, calcified, trying to relive a youth that in most cases they never had, being too scared of the English band in its prime, all the while being hawked overpriced merchandise as Jagger shouts the lyrics and the band plays and those of who were there the first time around puke.



But to hear John Batdorf and James Lee Stanley reinterpret their classics... For that I'll drive deep into the heart of suburban California, to a location I never even knew EXISTED!

A couple of years back, I got e-mail from James Lee Stanley asking me if I'd take a listen to his new album with John Batdorf, "All Wood And Stones", an acoustic reworking of Stones songs.

Remember when the Beatles hit and everybody took up the guitar? And you'd go to parties and sing the hits of the day? That's what this album sounded like, if you took the best two guys you ever heard in high school and they rearranged the tracks, making something new out of what was in your DNA, that you'd heard a zillion times before. The music was satisfying. It was old, but new. I felt it was a natural.

Alas, "All Wood And Stones" never broke through. It didn't get the exposure it deserved. Because rock radio is dead. Because the purveyors think the audience is dead, and can't listen to anything new. Mike Marrone played the album on XM's Loft, but one station on a service with a hundred odd channels that reaches far from everybody... I tried to get Sirius on the bandwagon, I felt it was a one listen record, but I never got a response to my entreaty, even though I was doing it out of passion, with no pay involved. The album languished.

But when Russ Paris e-mailed to tell me that Batdorf & Stanley were going to appear in his living room on Saturday night, I said I was IN! Actually, it was Felice who implored me, I'd put the album on her hard drive.

So we go over Malibu Canyon, drive further out than I ever do unless I'm going to Santa Barbara, and exit the 101 in Westlake Village. Who moves to Westlake Village? Why? I have no idea, but there are a ton of similar houses out there, don't drive home drunk, you'll never find your house!

And after missing the turn-off, we finally made it to Russ Paris' house.

It's hard for me to reach out and engage. But I didn't want to go to this gig and not introduce myself. And figuring the dude at the door with the shirt with the musical notes on it must be Russ, I hovered until he finished detailing the agenda to a patron, and introduced myself.

And that's when I got Russ' story.

He went to college back east, at Brandeis. But he missed California people. Funny, I've heard of missing EAST COAST people, then again maybe what he was saying was he was sick of the stuffy underpinnings of the east.

Anyway, he returned to L.A. and went to law school. He passed the Bar, but never practiced. He went into commercial real estate. But then gave that up to start a graphics business with his ninth grade sweetheart, now his wife, out of his home. This same home containing not only Russ & Julie, but their three children.

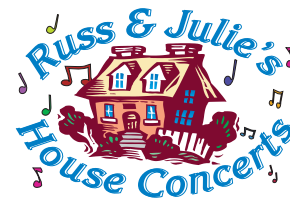
Yes, Julie showed me the room of Macs, but that graphics business was secondary to Russ' love for music. He'd been surfing the Web and had made contact with Severin Browne, Jackson's brother, and after convincing Severin that he truly DID have his two Motown albums, Severin invited him to a friend's backyard, for an album release party, eleven years ago. And experiencing this magical evening, Russ asked Severin, would he like to do a show at HIS house?

And thus began Russ & Julie's House Concerts.

<http://www.houseconcerts.us>

Better yet, go to the MySpace page
(<http://www.myspace.com/russjuliehouseconcerts>).

Wherein you can see the news video. Better yet, scroll down and watch Andrew Gold's live performance. THAT'S a house concert. The folksiness. The intimacy.



And then, as Donna Summer once sang, it was time to dim all the lights.

We sat down in folding chairs, Russ fired up the JBL sound system he'd purchased, and John Batdorf and James Lee Stanley started to PLAY!

I think "Ruby Tuesday" was the opening number.

I'm listening to it on my computer right now.

"She would never say where she came from"

Where did YOU come from? I came from the suburbs, half a century ago. My parents had hopes and dreams. They tried to give us a better life. And it wasn't about possessions, but experiences. Oftentimes MUSICAL experiences. My mother bought us our first records. She took us to the symphony, to the musicals, she got us HOOKED!

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How many times have I heard "Ruby Tuesday"? Not enough to burn out on it! And Batdorf and Stanley's take has stripped the patina and left only the essence, the wistfulness, the story.

I was right back in the sixties.

They played "The Last Time".

I bought every Beatle album, but not each Stones one. It wasn't like today, music wasn't free. But when their first greatest hits album, "Big Hits (High Tide And Green Grass)", was released, I immediately purchased it, the record was such a good VALUE! And my absolute favorite track, the one I played over and over again, was "Last Time".



*"Well I told you once and I told you twice
But you never listen to my advice"*

The ATTITUDE! They were conveying it ACOUSTICALLY!

The MUSIC, the ERA, it was coming alive.

I was elbowing Felice, she had a smile on her face, I only regretted that the music wasn't LOUDER, so I could sing along in anonymity!

That's what we do at the show, sing along with songs we know so well.

Not that I knew Batdorf and Stanley's original material so well.

All I knew was that John Batdorf was in a band with Mark Rodney that I never ever heard on the radio. But I was aware of them, I saw their albums in the store.

Batdorf played this one number, "Let Me Go", with James helping him out... John waxed rhapsodic about Stephen Stills' guitar-playing abilities, he was influenced by him. It was AMAZING to see John work out. And his VOICE! He hit every note, it was so sweet, I was TRANSPORTED! And I was only TEN FEET AWAY!

There's a power in music. And we baby boomers know it. It's part of our history, it's deep inside us. We don't understand the hip-hop and pop sold by the big time media, but we're open to new stuff, we're open to being entertained if you hit our soft spot, which has got to do with a certain mellifluousness.

You can't buy the original Batdorf & Rodney "Let Me Go" on iTunes, but I fired up my P2P app and THERE IT WAS! The band LIVES ON! So funny YEARS later to still have a presence in people's minds!

And James Lee Stanley's music was almost overshadowed by his stories, he's a naturally born comedian. He told us about escaping his father's house to go swimming and then building a fire to dry his bathing suit, having it burn up and then riding his bike home naked, FOR MILES!

That's the honesty lacking in so much of today's main-stream art/media. It rolls off our backs because it isn't made for us. It's made for non-thinking robots with no soul.



James Lee Stanley & John Batdorf

But the people at Russ & Julie's house had soul. They'd seen ups and downs. That's what life is about. Even losers get lucky sometimes. And the

winner's are not always on a high. But what gets us through is the music, it allows us to leave our bodies, leave our troubles behind, enter a sphere where we can't be touched.

Batdorf & Stanley finished the evening off with four more Stones songs. God, I could have listened to them play all night.

And when it was done, I spoke with John about having his first album produced by Ahmet Ertegun. And then switching over to David Geffen's Asylum. James Lee Stanley told me he'd gotten "All Wood And Stones" back from the distributor, he still had hope...

I said he was RIGHT! That they just needed the right exposure. Not once in some TV show, but as a theme on ESPN, something continuous. Because if people HEARD this music, they'd WANT IT!

But it's hard to get the message out these days. Amidst all the clutter. When it's thought anybody born in the fifties just wants to rest on his laurels, wants no new peak experiences. So Batdorf & Stanley fly under the radar, working in their own cottage industry. Makes me feel sorry for them. They record all this great music, but most people don't hear it. Still, they soldier on, because they have to!

I can tell you about the great shows I saw at the Fillmore East. I've seen my share of stadium shows, and enjoyed them. But it's those club shows that touched me most. Like seeing Bruce Springsteen at the Bottom Line, back in '74, the year BEFORE "Born To Run".

There were seats in clubs back in those days. But now music is something you've got to stand to listen to. It's about the shared experience more than what you hear in your head.

But the old experience lives on. Along with the old performers. In houses across this great country of ours. The gigs might not be reported to Pollstar, the CDs sold for fifteen bucks might never show up in SoundScan, but what's going down in these suburban neighborhoods is every bit as valid as what happens at those massive gigs with ducats sold by TicketMaster.

Deep in the show, Batdorf and Stanley played "Backstreet Girl".

For Chanukah one year, I got the Stones album "Flowers". It was not one of their best, it contained "Ruby Tuesday", but it was a slapdash collection. But it had this one song sans attitude that sank in. Hearing "Backstreet Girl" Saturday night, I was reminded of walking around the Bromley base lodge on a cold December day, singing the song in my head. That's what a great gig does, bring you back. Saturday night, I was brought back.

<http://www.allwoodandstones.com>

Bob Lefsetz

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