

Howie Wahlen Interviews Tom Dyer May 30, 2019 for release of *1+1 = ?*

Howie: We've known each other for quite a few years Tom and I think this the first time we've ever sat down for a formal interview. This should be fun. I've lost count, how many albums have you released?

Tom: Man, I don't even know. I have to count. Okay – I have ten albums of mostly new material since 2009 (The *Songs From Academia* albums were a mix of old and new). I've also put out three albums of basically unreleased 80's stuff since 2009, all three involved remixing/editing/mastering etc. So they are a bit different than they were in their original incarnation. And better of course I think. Who doesn't like revisionist history? I still have two albums of old stuff I am going to get around to, a reissue of my first cassette album *Truth or Consequences*, with a pile of 80's bonus tracks and Beautimus from the 90's with some extras from those days. They are floating around the backburner somewhere. Might get to one this year.

Howie: That's quite a few. This new one is a duets album. Usually when I hear an artist is doing a "duets" album I hold my nose and walk away. Why a duets album?

Tom: Well, this is not a Frank Sinatra or Ray Charles as old-fart-duets-on-the-standards-to-milk-an-audience stuff (I love those guys, just not that lame stuff). Usually when you hear the word duets you think two singers. That is mostly not the case here. Except for "Death At Mounts Road" where I trade off vocals with the fabulous Amy Denio, I sing all the songs. A couple have backing vocalists. These songs are duets in the sense I am making a song with one other person, usually an instrumentalist. Some, like Amy and John Carey, were involved from square one in writing the song. Others added something to a song I was already working on by myself, like Phil Herschi's gorgeous cello on "Heaven." It wasn't until "Death At Mounts Road" was done, when I looked back at this pile of songs that had been germinating unassigned for years that I realized they were almost all me and one other person. At that point I decided that would be the way on the rest of the songs I recorded to finish the album.

Howie: Are these formal compositions or are you flying by the seat of your pants?

Tom: Some of both. "Song of Frogs" goes back to the 80's. It is in a song book I used to keep lyrics in pre-computer. It had never been recorded, but I could still remember the main guitar part the song is built around. The basic idea for "Everything In The World Is Returning to A State of Nature" had been in my head for at least 15 years, back to when I used to take the commuter train up to Boston every day. I only finalized the words when I started recording it a year ago or so. Some of the most recent songs are totally seat of the pants. "When Roger Took The Bus" was recorded live with no plan of any sort. My son Ben and his pal Roger were playing guitar in the living room, I walked in, pushed record on my iPhone and started singing – 100% improvised on the spot. The recording on the album is that same iPhone recording – I knew there would be no way to recreate the moment.

Howie: So these are all original compositions (no covers)?

Tom: There are two covers, "Godmen Of The Future" and "A Girl Named Rainbow." Godmen is a Dehumanizers song that I recorded for a Dehumanizers tribute album in 2010. The song was originally recorded by the Dehumas for their "Kill Lou Guzzo" single in my Queen Anne basement studio long ago. This sounds nothing like the original. "Rainbow" is an Ornette Coleman song that he never recorded. I love Ornette. I bought sheet music for the song in 1977

and I had intended to record it ever since. I love the jazzy keyboards that Joe Cason from The True Olympians brought to the tune, particularly in the solo. It is the last song I recorded for the album, so of course it is my favorite

Howie: Who are these people you are dueting with?

Tom: They are all wonderful people! Probably first on the list is my daughter Kate. She's on a couple things here, but I've done a lot of songs with her including a whole Christmas album last year. She currently plays in an Oly country band The Purple Shadows. The opening track "Everything In The World" is a statement on the pure genius of Jim of Seattle. I did a Christmas song with him a couple years ago, "Big Black Eye," that came out delightfully. In this case, I sent Jim a recording with a lead vocal and a simple piano part that laid out the structure of the tune. Jim took that and orchestrated the whole thing and sent it back for me to add a pile of vocals. He even made it modulate a half step in the middle of the last verse just to screw me up – genius.

For "Mounts Road," Amy Denio came to Oly at 9:00am and left at 9:00pm the same day. We had nothing when she arrived and had a whole song when she left. Amy is not only a fabulous musician but she is just a generous warm human, a pleasure to work with. "Alaska," with John Carey, mastermind of The OF (I'm In Love With The OF), was pretty similar in approach. Got up, drove to Roslyn with the intent of making something crazy with John. Mission accomplished. Really fun. "Barbra" showed up at my door as Mark Brunke's completed guitar piece which we then recorded– he said let's add more, so we did. "Libya" was sent to me as a complete song except a vocal part by my dear friend the late Kenny Smith, an old rock and roller from Stax studios in Memphis. Add words and singing said Kenny. I did. All in all, I am grateful to have been able to collaborate with such a fine group of musicians.

Howie: I've noticed you have a predilection to try new instruments. Is there a new instrument on this album?

Tom: Probably the most significant is bass clarinet. I bought one a couple years ago. I am not very good at playing it, but I love how those low notes sound. I stick them in wherever I can and it makes me happy.

Howie: Is there a significance to the album cover?

Tom: Well the Mexican bull head lived in my grandparent's basement when I was a kid and it now lives in my studio. Y'know - priceless family heirloom! I took the picture a while back and it just seemed weird enough looking for this album. I like the shadows. The back cover is the inside of my eye captured off the optometrist's screen. I really wanted a cover where people would look at it and say what the hell kind of music is this?

Howie: If you could look into your Crystal ball, what does the future hold for Tom Dyer music?

Tom: That is a good question. I have been putting out music at a pretty regular rate, 1-2 albums a year, a couple singles and I certainly plan to keep that up. This album certainly ties up a bunch of loose ends, so on to the next!

I am getting ready to start a new album with The True Olympians - a concept album *Olympia*. It was broadly inspired by David Shearer Water's book of the same name, but I don't expect to tread the exact same ground. I have a bunch of brand-new song ideas that need to develop, like

“Mud” and Bucketful of Weird” a song about The Evergreen State College. I might keep it simple and go for a single album - just knock it out, but I might go over the top and make it a super extravagant multi-disc *Olympia* opus. We’ll see how that goes.

I have the idea to regroup The New Pagan Gods and do *History of Northwest Rock Volume 2* one of these days. I’ve had a potential song list assembled for a while and the fellas all have said hell yeah. I have enjoyed the one-on-one duet process sufficiently that I am certain I will do some more of these collaborations in the future.

I’ve done more political music than ever before since Trump, a Trump single with a fun video by Jeff Kelly and a couple political songs on The True Olympians album. I just did a revision of “Christmas In Olympia” to make it an Elect Helen Wheatley for Port of Olympia Commissioner song.

Howie: Thank you for your time Doctor.
Is there anything you'd like to add that I didn't ask you?

Tom: Can't think of a thing – thanks!