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# BRIAN AUGER'S OBLIVION EXPRESS

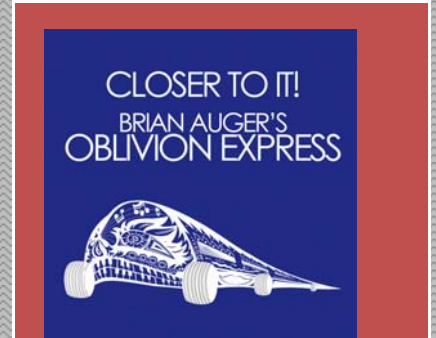
## *“Closer To It/Straight Ahead”*



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### **BRIAN** talks about the album “Closer To It”

While things had been starting very positive with “Second Wind”, *Jim Mullen* was offered a position as a guitarist in a blues band called *Vinegar Joe*. They were going to play several concerts in America and *Jim* decided to join them. That was a bitter blow to me. Later *Jim* told me that was the biggest mistake he ever made. *Alex Ligertwood*, my singer, was having marital problems. His wife was from Paris. She was very homesick and wanted to go back. After these losses, my drummer *Robbie MacIntosh* was convinced by his Scottish pal *Alan Gorrie* to join his band the *Average White Band*. Suddenly there were only



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*Barry Dean* and me left over – and that was it. I couldn't believe that a band like this is just gone!

At that time it was not easy to find a new band! There were not so many people around who are into both, jazz and rock, and are able to play it as well. But somehow, whenever I needed them, new musicians sort of materialized out of nowhere.

*Barry* knew this young guy called *Jack Mills* who played guitar. *Jack* was a spectacular rhythm guitar player and also a strong soloist.

Next, I had some auditions for drummers. I had a whole run of drummers coming through including some very well-known ones. The last guy was *Godfrey McLean* who had this incredible groove. He was originally from Guyana and he had a friend from Trinidad, conga player *Lennox Laington*. *Godfrey* said that he had worked a lot with *Lennox* and thought that he's a phenomenal player and might add something to the whole thing.

And I said, "Bring him with you to the next rehearsal. Let's try it." And these guys played fantastic together! They just fell into the band like right out of the sky. That was the funk rhythm section that I wanted. And suddenly there it was – "Closer To It".

Near Christmas 1972 I took the band with me to Germany. Previously, *Marvin Gaye's* album "What's Going On" was released and I was absolutely blown away by this. Especially by "Inner City Blues". I thought, "I have to cut that and record it with the band as a single." I just did a jam for the B-Side, which was "Light On The Path" and I just told them, "listen, this is an E minor nine to a F major seven, basically that's what we are doing." So, we jammed this.

When I had the two tracks. I took them home and listened to the rough mixes. Oh my God, I've got to make an album! I have to extend this and make an album. So we went back into the studio. I had just written "Happiness Is Just Around The Bend". I did not have the middle eight worked out for it but under pressure in the studio it's amazing how quickly you get these things together. I think the first take is the one on the original album. I'm more in the groove on that. Another tune that people ask for over and over again! There was a black guy from Chicago telling me that it was such a big hit in the black community when it came out. They would play it in dancehalls and people would get up and line dance to this song. (Laughs out loud).

*Barry Dean* wrote "Whenever You're Ready", *Barry* and I had written "Voices Of Other Times" in Italy, and so in one afternoon, we cut all those tunes in mainly first takes and a few second takes. And I wanted to do "Compared To What". I loved that tune. It was on an album called "Swiss Movement" which *Les McCann* and *Eddie Harris* made at Montreux. I particularly liked the lyrics at the time, the Nixon era. The lyrics are "The president he had his war / nobody knows just what it's for / nobody gave us a rhyme or reason / half of one doubt



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and they call it treason". It was very relevant during the last eight years. (Laughs). And people ask for that time and time again! The arrangement blossomed over the years and changed but the central point is definitely there. It's the one I use to set the house on fire at the end of the gig. (Laughs).

"Voices Of Other Times" is a beautiful memory of Italy. I was there with friends who had just come back from India actually. They had this kind of a hunting lodge on the top of a mountain. We had managed to find our way up and were invited to spend the night there. We sat by the fireside. It was really nice, big logs, open fire, some friends. When *Barry* started to play a couple of chords, I asked him, "What was that?" So, we put that tune together. I think I wrote all the lyrics and a little bit of the music. It was the vibe that I wanted and it sounds very nicely on the album. It's one of my favorite tracks. I was thinking of that time and how fleeting and strange the whole thing is – very introspective lyrics. We stayed there for a couple of days, off the road, on the mountain.

In the studio we played the stuff live. One rehearsal, then we cut. The next day, I came in at high noon and I put all the vocals on. Then I mixed the album. I went out at midnight.

I gave the album to CBS in London. I got absolutely no reaction. So, I send the album out to RCA in New York and draw a blank as well.

They had not heard anything like that, so they didn't know what it was. I told them that I would come over to America. I had a tour for six weeks in jazz clubs across the States in different cities. They said "You'll never sell anything in jazz clubs. Stay at home!"

My roots are really in American Jazz and R&B and I decided to go, whatever may come. Even if this would be my last tour in America. But if we go down, let's go down displayed with colors. I had one credit card. So I paid for everything before and took the band with me to the States. When we were playing in Cleveland, we met RCA's one and only black rep there, a guy called *Billy Bass*. He went crazy about the album and said this is the best product on this label! At that time, RCA was a country label. Apart from *Elvis Presley*, they had artists like *John Denver*, *Waylon Jennings* and *Dolly Parton*, all great artists, but I think RCA didn't know what they have to do with my music.

After three weeks on tour, the album breaks on to the charts – and appeared on Billboard's rock-, jazz- and R&B-charts at the same time! *Billy Bass* had convinced radio station WMMS in Cleveland to play it. A cut from the album went on air, every fifteen minutes. The album came as a real bombshell in Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York. In the end they invited me to have a dinner with the president of RCA. They asked me "What kind of music is this?" "Well," I explained "it's a mix of R&B, jazz and rock, something I have been worked on since 1965."



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I added four bonus tracks to the six tracks on the original. When I was transferring the tapes into ProTools we discovered the rehearsals of “Happiness Is Just Around The Bend”, “Whenever You’re Ready”, “Inner City Blues” and “Voices Of Other Times”. I thought that they’re worth the add.

(*Andrea Jonischkies*, quotations from an interview with BRIAN AUGER in May 2009)

### **BRIAN talks about the album “Straight Ahead”**

When “Closer To It” hit the billboard listings I was invited to a dinner with the president of RCA. His name was *Rocco*. I knew that the record division of RCA was only two percent of the entire corporation. When the Business Affairs-guys wanted to stop promoting “Closer To It” and to make the next album, I said, “Well, Rocco, I was already wondering if you’re running the record division as a tax loss on the overall corporation.” *Rocco* looked at me and, fortunately, started to laugh. He said, “I like your style, Brian. By the way, you musicians are not supposed to know about that kind of thing...! And he asked me to go back into the studio as quickly as possible and get a follow up album recorded. Then he’s fly us out to the States immediately to promote it.

The album title I chose was “Straight Ahead”, because I knew now where I stand with my music after “Closer To It”, I knew what I was doing and all I needed to do is push this, “Straight Ahead” from here on in. That’s what we did – and this album also went straight across the Billboard charts like “Closer To It”.

So we had to make an album before we went back on tour before Christmas. I chose “Bumpin’ On Sunset” by *Wes Montgomery* – which is one of my favorites and I always wanted to record that tune. On the track I was using a Freeman string machine. A Londoner, *Mr. Freeman* had invented a keyboard String Synthesizer. Today, you pick up a keyboard

and every one has got strings on it. But at that time there was nothing like that! The only thing that there was, was a Mellotron. A Mellotron was tape loops. The thing was, when you sustaining strings and the loop runs out you would have to take your hand off it to trigger the loop again. The Freeman keyboard would sustain as long as you wanted it to. The problem with a Mellotron was that it would only run as long as the tape loop was long. Then it would stop. If you wanted strings going from one chord to another you had to be inventive...I used it on “This Wheel’s On Fire” and did the best I could do with it. I think we recorded it on two tracks, and when it would stop on the first track, we would go to track two – and would start recording a little before the strings stopped on track one – and then mix both tracks together to get one seamless string track.



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I wrote "Beginning Again". We all begin again – all the time, every day. The lyrics are basically about confronting your own fears. Whatever it is that hangs you up or that you are worried about. You have got to look at these things, "If you can face your fears and make your problems scatter, if you don't win today it really doesn't matter. But baby, when you do, well brother I'll see you back at the beginning again."

*Barry* asked me, "Have you already written something like a 'Straight Ahead' track?" I said, "What do you mean?" "Well, I am writing something and I was going to call it 'Straight Ahead'." And I said, No, I haven't. Let me listen to what you have got." It was great.

"Change" is written by *Lennox Laington* featuring the skills of *Mirza Al Sharif*. *Lennox* brought the song into the studio and sang it for me. And I said, "Let me just write a quick chart." I took the melody he sang and asked, "Is that what you mean?" He said yes. It was pretty good, and we did some kind of Latin thing with *Mirza* on timbales. *Mirza* was a friend of *Lennox*, an Iranian, over in the UK studying medicine. One day he heard a Cuban band and was so taken by the timbales player that he took up the instrument himself. His playing was impressive, so we invited him to a rehearsal and for the duration of the album.

One thing I remember about the recording was that *Barry Dean* met this French lady. Generally, I liked the guys to arrive in the studio not with a load of friends who sit there and talk while we are trying to mix the album. But *Barry* brought this lady. They weren't getting on too well and so there were kind of almost fist fights in between carrying on and shouting at each other. It was absurd. And *Barry* came up with this tune called "You'll Stay In My Heart" in the middle of that. He was totally on the rocks at that time, and he came and played it to me and I said, "Okay, let's do it then." I thought that this was a kind of parting situation with this particular lady.

I put a *Carlos Castaneda* quote from the book "The Teachings Of Don Juan" on the original vinyl. What he says is that people struggle to be absolutely perfect, but in music – I connected it to music – there is no perfection. You might be able to play something that is perfect today, but then tomorrow you can't play it that way. You are making a little mistake here and there. It doesn't matter, we are not struggling technically. We are on a path of discovery, and it's an adventure and we go down that path, as *Don Juan* says, looking breathlessly. We will never know everything. Music is a field that is rapidly expanding all the time. The further you go with a candle into the darkness, then you'll find out that there is much more darkness that you thought there was. You will never get to end of it.



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The other great thing that I remembered was that *Godfrey* stepped out of the band and we managed to get *Steve Ferrone* to come in and play. *Steve* had followed *Robbie McIntosh* to *The Piranhas*, a great French band that played in the Casino in Nice. One evening in London I called the Casino again. The person who answered was the same lady I had talked to when I wanted *Robbie McIntosh* to join the band! “Je voudrais parler avec le batteur des Piranhas.” *Steve* came to the phone and I introduced myself. *Steve* said, “Who is this? Is this a joke?” I asked him if he wanted to come to tour the United States with the EXPRESS. He said, “What do I have to do?” I said I would leave a plane ticket for him at Nice Airport, to come over to London for rehearsal. Two days later he was on his way to London to hook up. *Steve*, when he came to London, met *Karma* who was about 4 years at that time. I still have pictures of *Karma* sitting on *Steve*’s knee. *Steve* was the guy, when he found out that *Karma* wanted to play drums, who gave him a load of drum stuff. He became something like a godfather to *Karma*.

The bonus track was recorded live in Denver, Colorado in 1975. And it’s *Alex* singing again. We used to play in Denver in this huge club called Ebbett’s Field. Ebbett’s Field was the name of a baseball field in Chicago. I suppose the guy who had played there many times, and I had no idea that they had recorded us. They called me and said, “Look, we have these recordings. Would you like a copy of them?” I said, “Absolutely”. When I heard “Straight Ahead” I found the way *Alex* sings is absolutely amazing. I must add it as a bonus track!

(*Andrea Jonischkies*, quotations from an interview with BRIAN AUGER in May 2009)

## **TRACKLISTING:**

### **CD 1: “Closer To It”**

1. Whenever You’re Ready – (*Auger*) *Brian Auger Music*
2. Happiness Is Just Around The Bend – (*Auger*) *EMI Songs Ltd.*
3. Light On The Path – (*Auger/Dean/Mills*) *EMI Songs Ltd.*
4. Compared To What – (*McDaniels*) *Sparta Florida Music Group Ltd.*



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5. Inner City Blues – *(Gaye/Nyx) Jobete Music (UK) Ltd.*

6. Voices Of Other Times – *(Auger/Dean) Copyright Control*

**Bonus Tracks:**

7. Happiness Is Just Around The Bend (Alternative Take)

8. Whenever You're Ready (Alternate Mix)

9. Inner City Blues (Alternate Mix)

10. Voices Of Other Times (Alternate Mix)

**CD 2: "Straight Ahead"**

1. Beginning Again – *(Auger) EMI Songs Ltd./Brian Auger Music BMI*

2. Bumpin' On Sunset – *(Montgomery) Keith Prowse Music Pub. BMI*

3. Straight Ahead – *(Dean) EMI Songs Ltd./Brian Auger Music BMI*

4. Change – *(Laington) Brian Auger Music BMI*

5. You'll Stay In My Heart – *(Dean) EMI Songs Ltd./Brian Auger Music BMI*



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**Bonus Track:**

6. Straight Ahead (Live in Denver, Colorado 1975)

- ★ BRIAN AUGER has set musical standards as jazz pianist, band leader, studio musician and Hammond-B3-innovator
  
- ★ Original albums fully remastered
  
- ★ Digipak incl. informative liner notes
  
- ★ BRIAN AUGER played with *Rod Stewart, The Yardbirds, Jefferson Airplane, Herbie Hancock, Julie Driscoll etc.*