

Fresh Fruit / RELEASES

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Brian Auger

„A Better Land/Second Wind“

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Overview:

Brian Auger talks about the second Oblivion Express album “A Better Land”

We were a new band finding our way in new field. There weren't any reference points. I was impressed that my idols Miles Davis and John Coltrane never seemed to be frightened to go in a completely different direction with each record. It showed the development of the artist, and that, I felt, was really important. “A Better Land” comes in complete contrast to our debut album, Oblivion Express, and shows our musical diversity. Mostly Jim Mullen and I collaborated on the writing but everybody had a free reign to contribute, write and improve their playing. I wanted everybody to move forward including myself. I needed an environment to stretch myself in. Again, the album was recorded at Advision studios. It had become our little home from home. We felt very comfortable there. This time, we had written all material upfront, and we even had rehearsed it beforehand which made a huge difference. We were prepared. It was not the usual scramble where we had to watch the clock ticking and race through everything. It was very relaxed. A lot of people tell me what they like about the album is that this time the jazz comes with



a division of



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acoustic guitars, warm and luscious west coast psychedelic style harmonies and some folk funk. Jim Mullen and I had been putting our heads together. He wrote or co-wrote seven of the tracks. It was his suggestion to arrange the Scottish traditional **“Marai’s Wedding”**. The two Scots in the band (Jim Mullen and drummer Robbie McIntosh), obviously knew the tune very well. Robbie had played this song while he was in a Scottish marching band learning to play drums. I tried to give it a more funky gospelly feel. That is one of my favorite tracks from the album.

“Dawn of Another Day” is about waking up to another day and drawing new strength from our natural surroundings. When things got stressful I’d spend some time near a lake or go somewhere quiet. I used to travel to Sardinia with my wife Ella. We would make a break for it every summer, we would relax, on the beautiful island where she was born. The words reflect that peace and stillness I felt there.

I wrote the lyrics on the song **“On Thinking It Over”**. The music was composed by Mullen and myself. I was going through a deep soul searching at that time, and I realized how many times I had made decisions that were really “off the map”. I was coming to the conclusion that I should struggle to peel back the layers of the “Onion Skin” to get to the real “Me”. I must say, it was a period when I felt the most lost.

I was living in the center of London at that time, near Leicester Square. And one day, when I came back from a walk I suddenly noticed that it had gotten much louder than it used to be, you know, the blend of the cities’ noise, the cars and all that. So I wondered how we would live in the future. Out of these thoughts suddenly came **“Tomorrow City”**.

Other contributors to the album were Alan Gorrie and John Mackie. I recently heard from John Mackie. He is another Scotsman, who turned up when we played in Aberdeen which is pretty far in the north of Scotland. He wrote the lyrics for **“All The Time There Is”** and for **“Women of all Seasons”**. Mackie had one lady in London and another one in Ibiza whom he saw only from season to season. I have always seen it in a more universal sense – a love song for all the women in the world.

“Fill Your Head With Laughter” speaks for itself. Musicians are always looking for new jokes.

Laughter was always like medicine to us. It was written by Jim and myself, together with Alan Gorrie who was in a band called Forever More. The Scots in our band, Jim Mullen and Robbie McIntosh, had sort of attracted a small Scottish community. Alan Gorrie was one, the other one was Roger Ball from Mogul Thrash. These two later snagged our drummer Robbie into their band, the Average White Band. This album like the Oblivion Express’ debut failed to ignite the critics but I could not have cared less. If people like Herbie Hancock, Les McCann and Eddie Harris sit up and take note – that means so much more to me than anything else. Interesting enough, later that same year, I was voted best Jazz and also best Rock organist in the prestigious German Rock’n’Folk magazine. No musician had ever won two categories simultaneously.

At that time the household names in Britain were bands like ELP, Yes and Genesis, and they were all great bands. However, the music press in England began to use those bands as the criteria from which to critique the rest of the music scene. They seemed to look down on anybody who was not playing anything like that – including people like Miles or James Brown! Anything that had a strong funk groove, suddenly was passé. When we came out with the album, they absolutely killed us. It was a depressing time for me. Except for one morning. The postman rang and I went to the door. He had a package for me which was obviously an album. The envelope had been sent to me from Milestone records in New York with a letter saying “Dear Brian, we thought you would like to have a copy of this.” The “Divine” Sarah Vaughn had chosen to sing three of my tunes on her album “A Time in My Life”. To hear her rendition of “Tomorrow City”, “On Thinking It Over” and “Trouble” has always been a high spot in my career as a musician. To me, that was a tremendous honor. To receive the biggest compliment for this album from my favourite female jazz vocalist of all time, cancelled all the “Slings and Arrows” of the outrageously bad press, and put my feet back firmly on the Path.

Brian Auger talks about the third Oblivion Express album “Second Wind”

Being on tour with “A Better Land” had shown us our limitations. Jim used some electric tracks but also overdubbed acoustic guitars. That is where you get the folky flavour from. On the road you could not play both instruments at once, so it was a much harder approach to the tunes. But finally, when we were recording Second Wind, we had a better idea of the direction for the band.

With our new singer, Alex Ligertwood, I had a very powerful band now. He and our drummer, Robbie McIntosh, had previously played in an R& B band called The Senate; they were big in Italy. We got him fresh from a recording with the Jeff Beck Group. He had written the title track of “Truth”, but the

writer's credit for the song was taken by Jeff Beck. Also, he had sung most of the tracks but in the end they did not like it and re-recorded it. Alex was very disappointed after that. He could not understand why they had done that—and neither can I. So I thought I might give him the proper chance to show his talent and credit him accordingly. In the studio he sang the vocal on “**Truth**” in one take. He was that good.

One time, when I was in New York at the Offices of Atlantic Records to see the head of promotion there, Mario Medious (The Big M), he was playing the Befour album to of all people Eddie Harris over the phone. Mario told Eddie that I had just come into the office, and handed me the phone. Eddie said, “This is the best cover of Listen Here I’ve ever heard. When are you going to do some more of my tunes?” I chose “**Freedom Jazz Dance**” for the **Second Wind Album**. Added to our studio version there is a live broadcast from 1971, which was recorded in Paris at Radio Europe Numero1 some months prior to the album. We had played it live before, but this was the very first time it was recorded. I managed to get a copy of that tape from the engineers.

I remember that so very well because Errol Garner was on the program with us, one of my favourite piano players. I went over to him and told him how much I enjoyed his music, I had just gotten his “Concerts by the Sea” album. He invited me to jam on one of his tunes on organ. Unfortunately they did not record that. That would have been phenomenal. But there is a little story that I heard about Art Blakey, who was another hero of mine, and Errol Garner. Art was playing PIANO with a club band—I never knew he had ever played piano. The club, like many in its time was run by the mafia. During the break, a guy came in. He asked Blakey if he could play some solo piano. Art agreed. It turned out to be an unknown Errol Garner. Apparently the club owner came and hired him on the spot, and told Blakey, “ From now on, you’re playing drums !” (Laughs)

My drummer, Robbie MacIntosh, wanted to do another version of “**Just You Just Me**” from the Befour album, in a sort of Tamla Motown way.

We were talking about putting “**Somebody Help Us**” back into our repertoire recently, because the lyrics are even more appropriate now, than they were back then, with the Vietnam war going on: “There’s an eagle flying, children dying, save the world from crying, help us. There’s a politician in the old tradition, selling superstition to us. You’ve got to find, what you feel, if you wanna know what is real.”

Romano Lombardi earned an album credit because he solved a major technical problem. I went to Italy in 1971, to a club called The Altro Mondo, the other world, a huge club in Rimini. At the sound check this little Italian guy tells me “It’s terribly distorted, the signal.” I said, “Yeah, I know but nobody can fix that. We have been trying to find a solution for two years now”. I was using Orange equipment at that time. And he goes, “I can fix it. Give me the organ and your rig, I bring it back later.” I asked the boss of the club, Who is this guy? I do not let anybody I don’t know drive away with my organ and maybe never see him again. The boss told me, “Oh, that is Romano Lombardi. He is an electronic genius. You can trust him. He has his own little factory and designs all these amps. Everybody swears by them. So if he says so, he can do it.”

He really did. He brought two of his amplifiers and two speaker boxes that he had built. And he had modified the organ, and when I played it that night, not only the people were amazed – I was too. Finally, there was my sound!! He did not want money, just my Orange equipment in return. I said, this is only worth half of what you gave me. At the end of the concert I had went to him again, I can’t thank you enough. Look, I must give you some money for this huge favour. And he says, “No, you don’t understand, I already sold four of those systems this evening to four other Hammond players that had come to the gig!!” Anyway, that really was the beginning of my organ sound.

We remained friends until he passed away about five years ago. He son runs a sound service, and when we were playing in Florence, he told me that his dad was in hospital. I drove there the next morning. Although he must have been in pain, he was so happy that I came to see him, that he got out of his bed and sat in his armchair, and we talked for a couple of hours. In the middle of this a priest arrived. Only a month later, I received a letter from his son telling me how happy he had been to see me for the last time.

Second Wind was one of those albums that really took off in certain places in the USA. San Diego loved it, New York loved it, Los Angeles and Philadelphia loved it. I felt we had a perfect blend of rock and jazz. Our hard work had paid off. While in Europe, Polydor Records did nothing with the album.

TRACKLISTING:

CD 1: A Better Land

1. Dawn Of Another Day
2. Marai's Wedding
3. Trouble
4. Woman Of The Seasons
5. Fill Your Head With Laughter
6. On Thinking It Over
7. Tomorrow City
8. All The Time There Is
9. A Better Land

CD 2: Second Wind

1. Truth
2. Don't Look Away
3. Somebody Help Us
4. Freedom Jazz Dance
5. Just You
6. Second Wind
7. Freedom Jazz Dance (Live In Paris 1971) (Bonus)