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BRIAN AUGER'S OBLIVION EXPRESS "Voices Of Other Times"

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Brian Auger talks about the album *Voices Of Other Times*

This is the album debut of the Oblivion Express Next Generation. And it is the first time that I recorded an album together with my son Karma and my daughter Savannah. Karma and I had been playing before in Eric Burdon's band, and Karma had been the driving force behind this album.

I like to think of the album as Savannah's maiden voyage. Savannah came in the band and almost immediately stepped

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into the studio never having done that before. (laughs). I was pretty amazed what she managed to achieve.

“It Burns Me Up” means I am angry about it. At the time I wrote this song it was about this: Some five million little children here in America, in a country which is the most affluent in the world, go to bed hungry every night, while politicians like George Bush even denied them healthcare. It would have cost around 8 million dollars to provide them with healthcare, which they did not have.. He vetoed that bill while spending 6 Billion dollars a week to fight a war in Iraq that never needed to be fought. That burns me up, you know. I am not about to bang people over the head with these observations, but. as an artist, it is my position to reflect what’s going on.

On this track, I am playing the Korg SG PRO X Stage piano, using a Fender Rhodes patch. Korg's Jack Hotop designed the piano, and as usual, did a really fantastic job.

The new version of **“Isola Natale”** (originally from the Open album) is more legato and laid-back. I wanted to get a particular feel and not overheat it. The tune is pretty old. I wrote it in 1967, and I am always amazed how modern it sounds when I play it. Like tracks I hear on the radio now. That is why I wanted to make an up-dated version of it and see how it comes out.

To open the track, I also got some guys at the beginning, to say something in Sardinian dialect. Over in Sardinia, one of my friends went out on the street and talked to these young kids who knew my music and recorded their reply. One of the guys says “put that on the turntable, ' -- " Poni bog ass' impiantu".(Laughs) Actually Sardinian is not a dialect but really its own language.

“Isola Natale” is a word play. My wife's maiden name was Ella Natale which means translated from the Italian, She Christmas; Isola Natale can also mean “island of birth, ergo Sardegna. The breezy feel is intended: like sailing on the blue Mediterranean on a beautiful day.

“Voices of Other Times” was a song that Savannah had chosen to sing. It was written a long time ago as well. The first version was on the Closer To It album which I sang. The song more or less came out of the environment. We were seeing friends in Tuscany, Italy, who were living on the top of this mountain. They’d just returned from Tibet and India, and when we got there, in the afternoon, they had all these prayer flags all over the old hunting lodge which were flying in the wind. It looked pretty amazing. Later on, in the evening Barry Dean had a guitar, and we were sitting around an open fire - and out came this song.

It is also the title track of the album. Often people ask me, who do you listen to? Who are your influences? I only can very generally pass on two or three names. In fact, my influences



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are really numerous and they all add up and lead to the way I play. So I decided to include all of them on the original cover and say thanks.

One of them is Marcus Miller. We play his song “**Splatch**”. Marcus Miller made a couple of albums with Miles Davis. In fact, he wrote the Tutu album, I think, it was. When Miles went into this semi HipHop Funk background, Marcus was the guy that wrote the arrangements. He made the album Tutu, then sent it to Miles and asked if he wanted to play on it. Miles liked it so much that he did, and it was a tremendous album. One track that I liked was “Splatch”. One evening, I was playing in a club, I asked the guys, do you know “Splatch” and they said, yeah, it is pretty easy, just a few chord changes. We played it, and it came off so well that I decided to include it in the album.

Well, we might have put a little too much reverb on the organ, but I don't think so. Some of the tracks they are like that, deliberately they have that for the atmosphere of the track like “**Soulglow**” for example. The reverb gives it a nice sailing feel, over the rhythm section. It is a very ethereal lyric, and as it was Savannah's idea for the tune, I tried to give it a different kind of atmosphere. She wrote the lyrics, and Karma and I wrote the music.

We worked together like this for the whole album: On Soul Glow we were hanging out in the studio. Karma had the drums there and we played together and put the back-track together, then worked on ideas about where to take it. I wanted to settle the whole thing in one key for a while but then thought of going to a really removed key for the bridge, creating a really tasty and surprising kind of change there. And then I figured out good way to transition back into the original key. It worked really great, I really like that track.

And I love the solos on Soul Glow. The guitar solo, the way Chris Clermont plays through the changes, is really super, I so enjoy that track. and I think I got a good solo off that fits the track perfectly.

With this album I was trying to be not so much “in your face” as we invariably have been for many years, it is a little bit of a different approach. The album sounds almost “ West Coast ”, I think.

“**Victor’s Delight**”: I love Latin, and I played with a lot of Latin bands, especially when I lived up in San Francisco. Karma was also taught by these Cuban guys here in LA. There were two Cuban masters that lived about a block away from us. Karma was also was friends with a young Cuban conga player. He had a little band and Karma used to play with them. Finally Karma was introduced to the Cuban masters who rarely ever teach anglo kids the secrets of Santeria, but realising that Karma was deeply interested in Latin music, they took him under



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their wing. Basically Santeria was the ancient ritual "Talking Drum" system the African slaves brought over to the islands and particularly to Cuba and Brazil. If you lived in the mountains in Africa, your god had a certain name and a certain rhythm, If you lived by a river, there was another god and another rhythm. Then there was the god of Chango, which was the god of thunder. There are 28 deities. If you want to play Latin music properly you need to learn about these gods and their ritual rhythms, and learn the proper rhythms for all of them. So I observed that these Cuban percussion Masters, study their ritual rhythms in the same way that I, as a keyboard player, study Harmony .

The reason Santeria was allowed was because the slaves had realized they could not perform their ritual ceremonies without getting into trouble with the authorities. So they masked their ancient gods with Christian saints, hence the term Santaria. From those rituals and rhythms came the basic knowledge of the main Latin guys especially drummers like Tito Puente and Mongo Santamaria and many more.

Karma spend a couple of years learning this. You can hear it in his playing especially when he solos. His Latin playing is spectacular. We also had one of those Cuban masters, Long John Oliva, play the congas on that track. He is also playing on the title track. We gave him a solo because he knew exactly what to play.

I wanted to write a piece for the great British piano player Victor Feldman, a guy who made it over to America and played for a long time with Cannonball Adderley. Then I heard an album called Cannonball Adderley live at the Lighthouse. The Lighthouse is in Hermosa Beach, LA County, I have actually played there (Laughs). When I first heard this album, at that time I was unaware of Victor Feldman. This was probably around 1962. His piano playing was so stunning that I almost gave up playing (Laughs). It made me go home and change all my left hand positions and it was really an uplifting and inspiring moment. This changed my piano playing really radically. A lot of my left hand harmony comes from hearing Victor Feldman. He had a tune called "Azule Serape", Blue Shawl, something that a lady or his wife would be wearing. I used a little of that idea to write "**Victor's Delight**". As far as I am concerned it had to be played on piano, and I really enjoyed that. It brought me back to my piano playing days in London and was a tribute to the great Victor. I hope, Victor would have been delighted. He is no longer with us. Since I first heard him, I have collected as many recordings as I could find with Victor playing, mainly on vinyl. He is such an inspiration to me. It is like getting a lesson each time I listen to him.

The track "**Circles**" is written by the guitarist Chris Clermont. We asked, "Is this going to be a instrumental or what?" And he said, well, I don't know. So we put the track down and it's a really great track. And along comes Savannah and says, I think I want to sing on that and produced the lyrics.



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Another track my daughter wanted to sing was “**Never Gonna Come Down**”. That was from the Happiness Heartaches album which is owned by Warner Brothers. It was the penultimate album I made for WB, and it was the last album of that formation of the Oblivion Express at that time. The great Lenny White (Return to Forever) played drums on that album. Again, Savannah had asked to perform this track.

“**Indian Ropeman**” is another track selected by Savannah. I have been asked for it so often and usually by young kids. I kept telling them, "You know, that track is older than you are, where did you hear that then?" " Oh, my mom and dad had this record called Streetnoise and we would play that track and dance to it." You just never know how far music actually reaches. So I did a slightly different arrangement of it, and it is still in the repertoire because people want to hear it everywhere. The intro was Karma's idea. Suddenly, you get this old kind of scratchy Organ Grinder thing,(the original intro from Streetnoise) and then the sound of the new track opens up.

Karma and I went into the studio one day, and there was nobody else around, it was just us. We started to play and recorded it. That was the track. Then we brought our bass player, Dan Lutz, and our guitarist, Chris Clermont in and started to build the track, and there it was, it kind of came out of the air. And we thought, what shall we call it – it was kind of a jam, but I have this theory about jam, real jam. When I suggested the title " Jam Side Down," the band asked for clarification of the title. I told them that I had come to the conclusion over the years, that the Specific Gravity of Jam, was obviously greater than the Specific gravity of Toast. Upon further enquiry, I was forced to explain that everytime I have made a piece of toast and put jam on it, if it fell off my plate, it invariably fell “**Jam Side Down**”. Happened to me hundreds of times !!!

(Andrea Jonischkies, from an interview with Brian Auger, June 2010)

Tracklist:

1. It Burns Me Up
2. Isola Natale
3. Voices Of Other Times
4. Splatch
5. Indian Rope Man
6. Soul Glow
7. Victor's Delight



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8. Circles
9. Never Come Down
10. Jam Side Down
11. Indian Rope Man (Live in Switzerland)