



July 8, 2009

Old Man Dreamin'

*"My dream is bittersweet
Cause I'm an old man dreaming in a young man's world"*

Ageism. You think it'll never happen to you. Then you reach a certain age and your opinion no longer counts, the kids control the music and those aged executives still in power wear baseball caps and try to act like kids themselves. If you don't look the part, don't play hit music, you might as well be dead.

But it's baby boomers who grew up with music at the center of their lives. There were no cell phones, there was no MySpace. We lived to twist the AM dial in the car, if we were lucky we had a phone in our bedroom. The glue that kept us together was the music. They call this music "classic rock." Classic, as in aged, as in done.

I was watching Billy Bob on Bill Maher. He posited that none of the acts of the last twenty years would be remembered after they were done. In other words, the youngsters have taken over the business and killed it. It's not what it once was. Now it's something you do to become famous, to tie in with corporations. It's all about raining money. Or, you're one of those individuals with little talent foisting your wares upon an uncaring public complaining you're not getting your due. And those of us who lived through the revolution, that period in the sixties and seventies where acts wrote their own material or reinterpreted the works of others to the point where you could barely recognize the tune, scratch our heads and wonder where it all went.

You can go see a classic band in concert. But you don't want any of their new music. It's the opposite of what once was. Rather than being vital and from the heart, it's mannered and bland. It's actually creepy. About as bad as their efforts to resist aging. Do they really think the audience wants to see old performers who appear younger than they are?

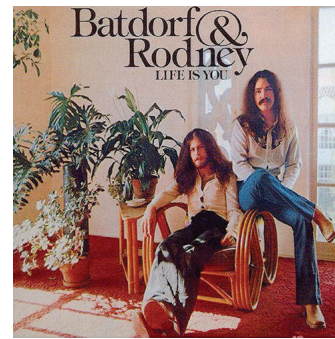
Going to the show today is nostalgia. Or, in the case of the newbies, a train-wreck, something that grabs your attention for an instant and is then removed from the tracks. The vibrancy, of a building career, by someone who's practiced, who has something to say... this is what the aged audience wants, but is not getting. The kids are out of the house or close to it, but no one is singing about their plight. You hear songs about teenage concerns constructed by those burdened with adult issues in their real life. It would be like Congressmen debating student council issues, debating who should be in charge of prom decorations as opposed to fuel mileage rules.

On one hand you've got a business driving towards a cliff. Pissed that the CD isn't as cool as an iPod, wanting to eviscerate the Internet. On the other, a desirous audience. An unfulfilled populace.

I'm gonna tell you a well known secret. The reason those classic acts can't write any good new material is because they've lost the hunger, the desire. The belief is if you just write a great song, become a star, then your life will work. But it doesn't. You can get laid by good-looking people, but you're still the shy outsider you always were. So, assuming you're still alive, and you wrote enough great tunes in your desire to make it, you can still tour playing those oldies, but your creative well is dry. But what if you never made it?

What if you had a recording contract way back when, made a few albums, but no one cared? Do you still have the creative spark? Do you still have the talent?

You don't lose the talent. You've invested all those hours, learning how to play, how to write. But can you get the motivation?



Prior to the Internet era, we couldn't own all the music we wanted. You made choices. So I never owned a Batdorf & Rodney album. Don't even remember hearing the act on the radio. Saw their albums in the bin, but just like most people don't have twenty cell phones, we couldn't own 20,000 albums.

But a few years back, I went to a house concert in the west valley and I heard Mr. Batdorf do some new material. And I was stunned, it was good!

*“My kids focus too much on pleasure
They think dad's sittin' on a buried treasure
I gotta message that might surprise them
When their old man can't subsidize them”*

The recession is blowing the younger generation's mind. They used to pooh-pooh working at McDonald's. Now they can't get a job there. Can't get a job at all! Dad has had his hours reduced, maybe Mom's lost her job, suddenly there's no money for the latest video game, movies seem too expensive, the world is no longer easy.

We kept reading about these entitled worldbeaters. You know these kids, you hate 'em too. But I've never heard a song about them. But that's what opens John Batdorf's new album, “Old Man Dreamin'”, the song “What D'Ya Got,” which delineates not only the plight of the younger generation, but the older:

*“What d'ya got when it turns pitch black
What d'ya got when there's no Prozac
What d'ya got when you ain't got jack
Can't you see*

*What d'ya got when your dreams get squashed
What d'ya got when your wires get crossed
What d'ya got now that won't get lost
Baby you got me
Ain't that enough
You got me"*

That's got to be enough. After you've turned in your Mercedes-Benz and leased a Hyundai. After you've sold your vacation home. After you've put the kids in public school. We've got a society based on shopping, on possessions, can you still be happy without them?

There's another song about the craziness of today's world:

*"Work two jobs just to buy gas to get to one
Takes three cars just to guarantee that one will run
I bought their lousy cars and yet
I'm payin' off their corporate debt
It ain't my debt"*



Okay, that's not a new concept. There are even lame country songs espousing the same anger. But how about this?

*"A hundred bucks buys a torn up pair jeans
Twice that much if you saw 'em in the magazines
With clever ads, sales are strong
Sellin' girls with barely nothin' on"*

That don't seem right to me, as the title of this song says. You convince the girls their butts look better in this pair as opposed to that and you charge them up the yin-yang. It's illegal to leave the house without makeup, to look human. That's why we loved our musicians. They didn't wear spandex, they didn't spend hours in the gym, they looked like us!

The piece de resistance is "I Thought I'd Try A Love Song." This is one of those seventies numbers that catches your ear through its magical changes that you ultimately catch the lyrics of and then smile.

That's the way the whole "Old Man Dreamin'" album is. You put it on and you like a few tracks and then you play it again, and after each and every play new nooks and crannies are revealed, you like it more, and then play it more. This is the classic rock experience. Coming home, breaking the shrinkwrap and dropping the needle and being drawn into a whole new world. Amazingly, this concept lives on in the twenty first century, with John Batdorf's new album.

I give him credit for soldiering on. It's hard to break through, especially when you're used to having someone else do the business. Now you need an MBA to make it. Unfortunately, too many of those people with degrees have the skills but are purveying substandard music.

I could sell this album out of my trunk to baby boomers. This is what they're looking for. Youngsters will laugh and say that the record is wimpy, but they never lived through an era where you could love both Joni Mitchell and AC/DC. There's nothing wrong with soft, there's nothing wrong with tuneful.

My second favorite track on the album is "Ain't No Way." I say that because we aged don't get to talk about music, not in depth, because no one cares. They care about SoundScan numbers, tour grosses, but the underlying premise, what those numbers are built upon, that's not a discussion that happens anymore.

*"Forty years and I'm
Finally in my prime
This should be my time
Or could it be it's over.....No way"*

Enough horseshit that people over fifty can't write and perform vital material, that the audience should just retire. People are hungry for fulfilling new music. And John Batdorf has delivered it.

<http://www.myspace.com/johnbatdorf>

<http://www.johnbatdorfmusic.com/oldmandreaminlyric.html#ifalltopieces>

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