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By Gary Graff | April 10, 2014 10:06 AM EDT

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Jack Bruce acknowledges that he felt some mild apprehension in making "Silver Rails," his first solo studio album in a decade. But those were quickly allayed once he started putting pen to paper with lyricists such as his wife, Margrit Seyffer, longtime mate Pete Brown and Kip Hanrahan.

"I thought it was going to be really hard to come up with songs that worked and that I like, but it turned out to be very, very natural and I just found it was so easy to write," the former Cream, BLT and West, Bruce & Laing singer-bassist -- last scene as part of the all-star Spectrum Road jazz fusion troupe -- tells Billboard. "I used the (1969 solo debut)

album 'Songs For a Tailor' as a template and I kind of listened to that and I based the kind of atmosphere and the feeling of the songs on 'Silver Rails' on that, so it's kind of a bookends, if you like."

The result, Bruce adds, is a characteristically diverse but straightforward and accessible collection, with some songs he agrees "are pretty laid back for me. But then there's still things like 'Hidden Cities,' which is a pretty intense piece of music and quite amazing. I find it's very deep. Whenever I've done solo albums I like the diversity of what I've come up with, but sometimes it's a little too diverse, a little too difficult or a little too dark. This one, it's got dark corners, but I find it quite optimistic in a strange kind of way."

Blues is part of "Silver Rails' " makeup, of course, surfacing in the set's second track, "Reach For the Night," one of seven songs he wrote with Brown -- a collaborator who dates back to the Cream days. "He wrote the lyrics on a plane coming back from Germany and I just set them to music because his lyrics really suggest images to me, forms and images. "It reminded me of some of those old songs from the 20s or the 30s, like 'Brother, Can You Spare a Dime' or something, kind of like the Depression songs. It just suggested that to me. I thought if I could have a descending (bass) line that never comes to rest until it gets to the chorus, that was kind of my template."

Bruce recorded "Silver Rails" -- which is already out in the U.K. and hits April 15 in the U.S. -- at EMI's famed Abbey Road studios in London, a "fabulous" experience that he says came about by accident. "I was going to do it in another well-known studio in London," he says, "and I went to see a premiere of my daughter's new film and met Rob Cass there, who's the in-house producer of Abbey Road. And he said, 'Why don't you come and make the album at Abbey Road?' Of course I jumped at the chance of doing that, 'cause I think it's the greatest studio in the world. We were working in Studio 2, which is the famous Beatles studio. I've worked quite a lot there going back to the 60s, and then there's the amazing Studio C, which is where 'The Dark Side of the Moon' was recorded and a lot of other good stuff, too. There's sort of music stuck to the walls, and also the musicians tend to play up a notch because of where you are. It's all very nice."

Bruce is joined on "Silver Rails" by BLT partner Robin Trower, Roxy Music's Phil Manzanera, Bernie Marsden, Uli Jon Roth and Spectrum Road bandmates John Medeski and Cindy Blackman Santana. Bruce says he hopes to make a second album with Spectrum Road, which also includes Living Colour's Vernon Reid, but he's also planning to have "a nice summer" at his vacation home in Majorca. "I'm going to go there for the summer and write the next solo album," Bruce predicts. "I've already got a couple of songs, so hopefully it will be just as easy and natural as ('Silver Rails') was."

