

Track By Track: Oblivion Sun - Oblivion Sun

By John A. Wilcox



Take guitarist / vocalist Stanley Whitaker and keyboardist / saxman Frank Wyatt from Happy The Man, add keyboardist Bill Plummer, bassist Dave DeMarco, and drummer Chris Mack, and stir! The result is the band Oblivion Sun. Oblivion Sun plays symphonic, melodic progressive music with bits of jazz, rock, and funk thrown in the mix. Let's go track by track and have Whitaker, Plummer, and Wyatt walk us through their self titled debut...

Track 1: **Fanfare**

FW: Fanfare is a song that I wrote specifically for opening a live set. I wanted something that hit loud and hard right from the top to get everyone's attention, and then opened up to introduce the band's instrumentation. The repeating cadence section starts out with piano, adds moog on the second pass, some strings next, then guitar, and a layer of pizz

counterpoint to top it off, all the while with bass and drums building. I used Copeland's *Fanfare for the Common Man* ever so subtly (hopefully) in the background thrice in the song with a French horn section to augment the fanfare idea. The piece seems to work well in its intended role as an opener.

Track 2: **The Ride**

SW: The Ride is a simple rocker very different from anything I wrote with HTM. I've always had a serious rock bone in my body so this is a toon HTM never would've done! I always loved Free and Humble Pie right alongside of Crimson, Gentle Giant and the rest of the proggers, so I love having a band where I can truly express that side of myself. Hope it's not too 'commercial' for all the hard-core proggers out there:-)!

Track 3: **Noodlepoint**

BP: Noodlepoint – This tune was composed with Happy The Man in mind, at least some parts were. There was a brief period in the late 90's when Stanley and I talked about me playing in HTM. I had a full time engineering job at BET Jazz at the time but the talk did inspire me to begin playing a good bit more and attempt to learn some of the older HTM tunes such as *New York Dreams Suite*. After some buzz got going about a HTM possible reunion, David Rosenthal was brought on for keys and I was asked to do the live sound. I met Chris Mack when HTM played NEARfest in 2000 and Chris offered us his kit for our set. Chris and I became friend very quickly. He came to my house with some friends to jam a bit. We quickly worked up an untitled piece that became Noodlepoint. The song's intro was not included in the OS arrangement but may surface in some live shows if I can figure a graceful transition into the recorded version. In rehearsal with OS, we made some changes including the whole tone sax solo section. The bass part in the final section was changed while recording the CD. Many parts on the CD were fluid in the studio, some being added or thinned to fit the feel of what was happening at the time. The song name came about in rehearsal one day. We were working up *Tales* and when the guitar solo section came about I told Stan that this was his noodle point. He said "That's a great name for a song". I agreed.

Track 4: **Catwalk**

FW: Catwalk is one of those songs that just came out of nowhere. I was working in the studio one day and happened to play the bass line, or left hand. The rest of the song, lyrics and all, was completed that same day. I am a great fan of Lewis Carroll and the whole *Through the Looking Glass* concept as well as being a cat lover, so it was just an easy writing experience for me.

Track 5: **No Surprises**

SW: No Surprises is actually a very old toon of mine that I wrote in the final dying days of HTM in 1979. It was one of the first toons for my followup band to HTM called Vision that I formed with Rick Kennel. It originally had vocals (very gifted rock vocalist we found

named Rocky Ruckman - shoulda' been a star!) I loved the feel of it so we reworked it for Oblivion Sun. A funky little ditty!

Track 6: **RE:Bootsy**

BP: RE:Bootsy – This song had nothing to do with either HTM or OS when I wrote it. It came from a song idea I used for a surround sound demo I was doing at the AES and NAMM trade shows. An old friend, Paul Wolff, wasn't (isn't) very fond of odd meters and always refers to music I like as math music. Paul Wolff is an engineering genius and used to own API, a company that makes some of the finest audio consoles ever made. In any case, the first day of AES, Bootsy Collins came by the booth and had a listen to the two demos I had recorded. Bootsy thought the song grooved and was happily surprised at hear my music for the first time (I had done some engineering work for him with George Clinton in the past; he did not know that I played – a recurring theme with some of my musician friends). I composed this demo at guitar builder Paul Reed Smith's home and Paul was very helpful in writing the melody. Paul Smith has been a long time friend of HTM and mine. Stanley and Rick Kennell were among the very first to own and play Paul's guitars. Stan plays PRS guitars exclusively to this day.

Track 7: **Chapter 7.1**

SW: Chapter 7 is a toon I wrote when I was living in LA right before moving back to the east coast to reform HTM. I had actually gone through a bankruptcy so it seemed appropriate! Dark and brooding. Meant to be very King Crimsony. Frank and I first recorded it on the Pedal Giant Animals CD and later did quite an update on it with Oblivion Sun, thus it became Chapter 7.1!

Track 8: **Tales Of Young Whales**

BP: Tales Of Young Whales – Of my three songs, this is the only one I composed after OS had formed. This song came to me quickly, the majority of it being written at home over one evening. The first version we worked up was OK but need more development. I had a part that was incorporated into the center of the tune that developed into the guitar solo section. I later added the third section with a reprise of the melody over a different chord sequence. This is my most satisfying song for the CD because it was specifically written for Oblivion Sun. Thanks to Paul Reed Smith for the title.

Track 9: **The Golden Feast**

FW: The Golden Feast is part of a larger work, which I have been writing for two years, and hope to score for an orchestra someday. It is inspired by the C.S.Lewis space trilogy written back in the thirties....wonderful science fiction with a deep philosophical meaning. Contrary to Catwalk, this is a serious work on my part and has involved quite a lot of effort. The band's arrangement of this, the third movement of four, adds an improvisational section that is not in the greater work, and the instrumentation is of course very different, but it is a very nice song when treated this way, and is really a lot of fun to perform.

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