

Frank Gutch Jr: Jon Strongbow: Meltdown in Alien City— Plus Notes.....

There are thousands of stories in Music City and this is one of them. It involves a young musician— in fact, a young artist, as **Jon Strongbow** dabbled in many different arts, possibly even the occult. A musician implanted with an idea which would end up almost destroying him and yet become a central point from which the rest of life would emanate.

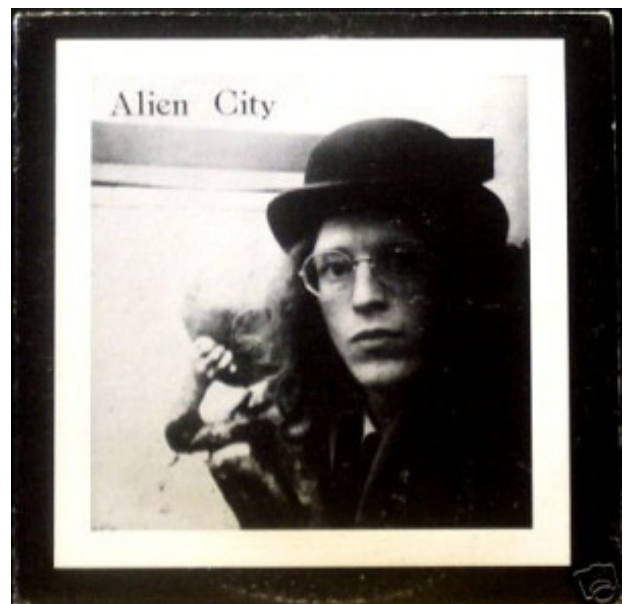
If that sounds ominous or convoluted, it should. Strongbow's existence cannot have been easy, what with sidesteps into mental institutions and through mental windows while the reflection in the mirror of reality kept morphing. And yet he adapted.

I had never really heard of Strongbow until one day, I received a message from mixing/mastering engineer **Steve Turnidge** asking if I had ever heard of an album titled **Alien City** and did I know the story behind it. I told him I had not a clue except for seeing the album in the used racks at Cellophane Square or Second Time Around, used record stores I would occasionally visit in Seattle's U-District of the Eighties. You have to hear it, Turnidge wrote back. Since hearing it, it is stuck in my head and I can't get it out. You *have* to hear it, at which point he supplied a link to a Soundcloud page we had used in the past to get the music of **The Norrish Reaction** and **Sage Run** to me. (Turnidge is one of a few who work in music I trust implicitly when it comes to music, the artists he finds somehow striking a serious chord within)

I didn't follow the link right away. Per usual, I was swamped with work, mostly following up on promises I had made to review certain albums. Another message from Turnidge awhile later did not produce results but the third, shortly thereafter, did. He included an mp3 of the album, a Turnidge remaster. I listened here and there, not ready to work my way through in one sitting. Slowly the music started to make its way into my head. The music sounded dated but good. The ideas behind the music, though..... The more I listened, the more I thought sci-fi and then seventies and progressive rock and glam and even Bowie. My mind started spinning.

So I hooked up with Turnidge via Skype and five minutes into the conversation, he called and linked in Strongbow and I clicked on the recorder and the rest is history. Well, part of history. What you will read, if you are of a mind (and if you aren't, may the gods warp your entire Beatles collection), is a conversation between myself, Steve Turnidge and Jon Strongbow, completely off the cuff. It will tell you what I have only hinted at— the story behind **Alien City** and its creator's struggle to survive mentally against what must have seemed at times incredible odds.

If you ignore the shop talk, which I leave in for those knowledgeable about the behind the scenes activity as regards



music, I guarantee you will be enlightened. This is about the people as much as the music.

But first, now that you have my background in this musical archaeological dig, meet the others, as written by themselves.

Jon Strongbow— *I've been an artist/musician since I was a kid, and dropped out of high school because it was getting suicidal, and after a few years dropped out of art school for similar reasons. In 1974-79 I was putting myself back together from a complete mental/spiritual/physical freakout; what the psychiatrists call a full blown schizophrenic breakdown. A large part of my recovery process was writing music and performing it. I put together this huge song cycle called Alien City about seeing clearly in an insane world, waking up and going to sleep. That was the theme. The "story" that went along with it, was more of a poem, but you basically wake up and realize you've been sleeping, and you want to wake up to your true self. Everything in this life is against you ever becoming your true self. Everyone wants you to be just like them, to buy the fashionable clothes and to strike a fashionable pose. I taught the music to my group of creative outsider friends and we recorded half of the project, which was released as the vinyl lp in 1979. This project was doomed for some reason; master tapes were lost and destroyed, boxes of albums stolen, friends alienated, madness! I was still young, so I put it behind me and went on with my various projects.*

Steve Turnidge— *My first encounter with the Alien City record was being asked to do a favor for a good friend. This friend had mentioned Jon Strongbow over the years, and I took very little notice; just another artist.*

Evidently, this was a very rare record, and there was only one sealed copy left. I was given that copy to capture, restore and master. This favor pivoted on the fact that our mutual friend donated a very high end turntable to my studio, so I was happy to make this happen for him. I opened the record, and found that in addition to the surface being very scuffed, an inch of the diameter was warped by perhaps a half inch. This made the capture practically impossible; the stylus would ski-jump off the record every revolution. I still tried and recovered a very thumped version of the record, but it wasn't worth pursuing.

Later, evidently, there was continued interest from labels wishing to re-release Alien City. We discovered that our mutual friend still had his copy of the record, and that it was flat (not warped). This provided source material that I could work with. I found the quality of the vinyl used was very poor, and the state of the surface was scraped with stamper rash. In addition, there was nearly 30 minutes of content on each side, resulting in a bass deficient and high noise-to-signal release. Fortunately, my toolset and experience made this into a fun project to recover and restore, regardless of the actual content of the record.

I approached the project as an academic exercise, not realizing the content would become very significant for me. After the record was restored and mastered, I started actually listening to it, and found we had unearthed a lost treasure. I brought Jon Strongbow to the studio to hear the results (he hadn't even heard this record for 35 years), and the connection was significant. The music started to enter my dreams, and I had the record on endless repeat for a month.

When I find audio treasures, I usually share them with Frank Gutch, Jr. right away. Jon Strongbow and I had a Skype chat with Frank, and here is the substance of that call...

With that, I am going to print the conversation the three of us had that night. Consider the fact that I had no real clue as to the stories behind either the album or the remastering. I was nothing more than a bystander hearing a story for the first time, much as you are now. We begin with the conversation in progress.



Jon: **Chinas Cominas: Rich Riggins, (Cynthia Genser)** and **Peter Barnes** were brought in for the **Alien City** sessions. Some other people were scheduled for Part 3. **Al Sharp** and **Gary Minkler** from **Red Dress** were planned for a song about an outsider who runs around naked with a pack of dogs. The project was recorded in the basement of **Oxo Studios** on Capitol Hill. It was done on a TEAC 8-Track, I think; maybe even a 4-Track, and we bounced... I forget. What happened was we pulled this one mix, the mix that's on the album, but you know how it goes. That was a first mix for me to go through and say "here's a mistake, let's correct that," and "the level is too high here, let's bring them down," right? Unfortunately, we pulled that one mix and the tapes were then lost or destroyed. The masters. So that was all we had to work with and I was not happy about that. In time, even that first mix disappeared! Then, a series of unfortunate events continued to occur. As Steve probably mentioned, at the time we were naïve enough to cram 30 minutes of music onto each side and we weren't supposed to do that. We were supposed to put like 20 minutes on each side. So ultimately, as you can tell, the volume levels on the actual vinyl were low and there is no low end and.....

Frank: I have never heard the vinyl. I have only heard the files that Steve gave me.

Jon: What Steve did really kind of like blew me out of the water. He restored the volume levels and brought back the low end.

Frank: How did the record actually get made?

Jon: None of us had any money back then. We were kids. I think I was 23? When my musical associate, Paco—he's the guy who played bass and guitar and did background vocals. He was like my main companion on the project. He and his girlfriend are the ones who pressed the album, and they chose the cheapest company to press it. I think it was this California company and I don't remember the name of it. I thought because they were the cheapest company, I thought maybe they were just using inferior vinyl or something. Steve says, no, that's the press. They did not maintain their press. And that's why you hear such static and surface noise.

Steve: Stamper rash. That's only on the original. That's the beauty of it.

Frank: Okay, Jon, you have one hour of music on the album. Is that same hour of music on the same project that Steve worked on?

Jon: Yes.

Steve: It's close to an hour.

Jon: Yes, Steve took everything that's on the disc, which always sounded crappy to me. And that's one of the tragedies of the whole thing because a), like I mentioned, we couldn't go to the master tapes because they had been destroyed or lost. When the album came out, it sounded like crap... to me. And then most of the albums were stolen. We were just beginning to launch a campaign. I think we were among the first people to put out an album that was totally independent and out of left field. Especially when you consider that we were underground and into metaphysics, and it was designed to have this mystical healing effect. We wanted to conquer the world. We were kids, you know? (laughs)

Steve: It may still happen, Jon, with this release.

Jon: But then what happened was that the albums were stolen, so we were in a state of shock. It was like this project was destined to fail. I don't know if Steve told you this, but the **Alien City** album as it was pressed was only half of the original piece. There is still another hour left of it which was partially in the can which is also gone.

Frank: You had more in the can and that has disappeared too?

Jon: Yeah, except that about five years later, I was given money by a lady who loved my work and had, with her

husband, an underground recording studio. I went in and recorded about three pieces from **Alien City** which would have been included on sides three and four, and those still exist. They're up in Camano Island on a hard drive. We transferred it from the original 8-Track to digital. Of course, none of that stuff existed back then.

Steve: Those are with Patrick?

Jon: Yeah, Patrick has those. And one of the things I want to work on when I go up there is to develop those three songs or to see if they are worth it all, anyway.

Steve: One of my visions for this in terms of the big picture is that since you were gone for 35 years and, in essence, this human who made this record, no longer exists. You do, but.....

Jon: Well, that's a valid observation, but at the same time, *Alien City*, though I totally put it aside when all of the terrible things started happening, continued to influence my work—the evolution of my life—a lot. I have used a lot of the musical themes in other songs and also have done a few instrumentals based on it, and that's why it has been a really cool thing for me to have it remastered like that. I sent you an MP4 of a song I redid from *Alien City*, *Information Overload*. I revised it and called it simply *Information*. We used to play that all the time in the late 80s. We recorded that version at Green Monkey Studios—completely reworked, you know. It came out on a Jon Strongbow album titled **Something Different**.

Steve: Frank knows Tom, by the way.

Jon: **Tom Dyer?** All right. What a wonderful kook.

Steve: My point is that from a marketing point of view, that person who made that album is influencing me as well.

Frank: You're talking about Jon in those early years?

Steve: Yes. Jon in his earlier incarnation who made this record and wrote these words and made the whole thing happen.

Jon: I have moved on and evolved.

Steve: That's the thing. You have. And I think the helical nature of time has come into play, where it comes around, and your current self and your past self kind of collaborate on the new version.



Jon: I was thinking about what you were saying to me earlier, Steve, when you were talking about this project existing as a kind of time capsule—since it was written and executed in '78 and then was released in '79—that it was, like you said, was unsullied—or had existed in this time which hadn't had the influences of the 80s and 90s.

Steve: Yes. The influences are all '79 and before.

Jon: Yeah, and the 60s, basically. The 60s and 70s.

Steve: I hear it in the music, Jon. I hear things in the music which are part of nerdcore now and that are being used even in a lot of rap and hip hop. Some of the call and response things.

Jon: It could be. I don't know. Everybody has been telling me for years that I am way ahead of my time, but I still don't understand, so I don't flatter myself.

Frank: You always have to take into consideration, Jon, that what a listener gets out of it is a lot of what we bring to it. So we relate to a lot of what we have already heard, but in a different context.

Jon: *That is a good observation, actually. That's probably true about most everything. I deal with that on a daily basis in working with people at The Market selling my art. They're asking me what this means and I'll say, well, I could tell you what I was trying to do, but what it really means is a personal thing you have to figure out yourself. And they seem to understand that— that they bring things to it.*

I know I invested the album with a lot of multi-layered ideas. You know how when you're speaking in a certain language, you have to be very mindful of what you're saying— different words and accentuations can have influence on lots of different levels. Things can be interpreted, and usually are, in weird ways. I don't know. I might be getting away from.....

Steve: *So the lyrics are— and, again, I think I am uniquely qualified to say this since I have listened to **Alien City** numerous times each day for the last month or so...*

Jon: *And you still like it?*

Steve: *Oh, dude, it's great. When I'm sitting in the car alone, and that's when I play it most, I am starting to sing along with most of the lines as I recall them, singing them out loud and belting them out, basically. Because it seems very special to me and I want to protect that special nature. And I want to protect your past self because your past self is consistent and contemporary with my past self. What happened in '79 and what we were all going through at that time... these things have echoes and repercussions... what formed me.*

*But the critical part is that it was lost and now it's found. That whole parable is a story. And the other thing is that songs like Information Overload and Cathode Ray and Dirty Heaven— songs which can really open the third eye, in a way, for the general public. My vision is that this could become an enlightening event. Which sneaks in under the guise of maybe here's Ziggy Stardust several years on. Check that out. And the story— especially the story— is so intriguing, even in its mythical state. Like you stated on the back of the album... **Alien City** was composed over a period of five years...*

Jon: *Which was a joke (snorts).*

Frank: *Are you sure it's a joke, Jon? Or are you just brushing it off?*

Steve: *Good point.*

Jon: *Well, you could say that any piece of art took a million years to make, you know. (laughs)*

Frank: *The question is... you have to realize that when you tell your story, it does not have to be factual. Especially when we're looking at music which is very progressive which is what this is. You have to realize that you are stretching not just the musical boundaries, but also time boundaries. I've had musicians say, I came up with this song when I was twelve and I finally recorded it when I was 40. And that's fine. It makes sense to me. So don't worry about being exact.*

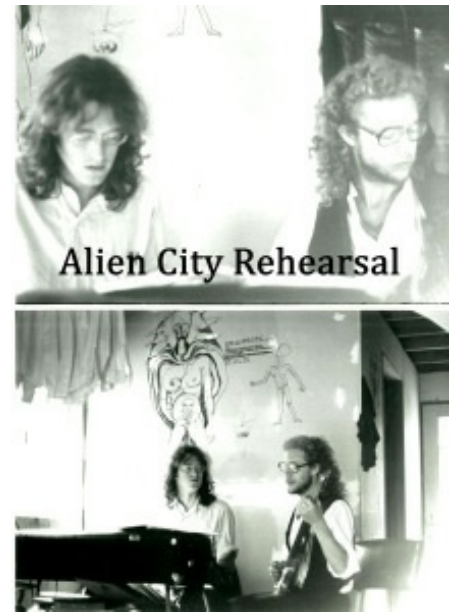
Steve: And the story. If you consider what was happening in '74. Because this album sounds like it could be from '74.

Frank: Exactly. That's what I told Steve. The first thing I thought was this was a cross between like glam and prog of the early 70s.

Jon: Yeah, the album definitely had its inception during those years— '74, '75, '76. I wrote it down in '78. I was working on it quite a long time, but I started really writing it down a year and a half or two years before the recording.

Steve: This is what I am trying to get at. This person we see in the pictures from the day. This cover, for instance. This cover used to freak me out when it was sitting around my studio— for a year. I looked at it and thought, well, what kind of lo-res thing is that. What is behind you on this cover? What is that?

Jon: That picture was taken with a Polaroid camera by my girlfriend when we were living in Paris. That was an advertisement next to the Paris Metro which showed a starving Biafran baby, and to me, it personified everything that *Alien City* was trying to say. It was actually photographed before the album came out. I gave it to the people putting the jacket together hoping they would use it because I thought it was a good shot.



But the whole project really gets down to how sensitive we are as a people, especially when we are children. Every day I talk to people and see them sad because their parents have denied them an active imaginative life. Maybe it's different now with kids, but I remember how different it was for me as a child because I came from an artistic family and when I was growing up as a child in the country, it was more or less idyllic. All of the kids wanted to be around my mom because she gave them permission to be free, to use their imaginations, to dress up, to participate in the arts, to sing and dance about. That was who she was and she provided that kind of milieu. This is getting down to some autobiographical crap here, but it's important because when I finally went to junior high school, when they forced me into public schooling and bussed me into the city, that was when I started getting the shit beat out of me by the stupidity of my fellow human people, you know? People can be so stupid and cruel and it doesn't have to be like that at all, right? It occurred to me at the time that bullies were trying to cover up their sensitivities.

So when I made *Alien City*, it was kind of a nod to the whole situation that exists on Earth. That we as a whole Earth, would allow hundreds of thousands of people, of children, to just starve. When I realized that, I was thinking, here we are, starving in a different way. We're starving for community. We're starving for feeling good about ourselves. We're starving to know who we really are and to know what we're supposed to be doing. Does that make sense?

Frank: I understand. Have you ever heard of *Magma*?

Jon: *Magma*.....

Frank: Evidently not.

Jon: Aside from what exists in a volcano.....

Frank: *Magma* was a European band centered around a drummer named **Christian Vander**. He put together a trilogy based on the destruction of humanity by its own hand. He even developed a language that was mathematically correct, so what you heard on every song was in this language. In this trilogy, which is basically a sci-fi fantasy kind of thing, things are starting to fall apart on Earth and things keep getting worse and there is a section of the populace who have this mental awareness. What happens is that everything is coming to a point. I guess if you've read Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, the *Magma* trilogy is an opposite side of that. Whereas Rand's position was that only the brilliant people can do anything for the world, Vander took it to the opposite extreme, wherein only the

enlightened people could save the world. In the process, at the end, they reach this State of Grace. Musically, it builds and builds until they reach the apex.

My question to you is, how much are you going to want to develop the story behind the album in conjunction with the album itself? These are things you need to think about. Another thing is, how personal do you want it to get? Because there are a lot of things behind this music that may not be that much fun to relive.

Jon: Right. That is both a good question and a deep question too. It really gets down to the point that only half of the record is accessible. The other half, it does kind of come full circle and does have to do with what you were just talking about—the awakening inside of some kind of enlightenment. That when things fall apart and start getting horrible, when all of the shit starts going on, that we can choose to see things in a better way. That's kind of what happens toward the very end of the whole thing. By the other half, I mean the parts which are not on that album. That weren't recorded.

Even though I think **Alien City** works as it is now, it is more like if you were watching a movie, when that album ends, it would be intermission. After hearing **Alien City**, to get the whole story, you would have to come back after an intermission.

Steve: A 35-year intermission.

Frank: You will have to think about... I'm assuming that you are going to want to talk about this, am I right?

Jon: To the best I can. (laughs) Maybe Steve will say, maybe we shouldn't let this out.

Frank: Steve and I have already talked about things along those lines. Because we're not sure if there are some things you may not want out there.

Jon: I'm fine with anything, as long as I can get a handle on it. I write about these things all the time so I am not a stranger to accessing painful situations. I am always attempting, myself, personally, to understand them. I use the discipline of writing. I always have and it helps me a lot to be able to talk about these things and understand them. Because if we don't sift through our personal lives and try to make sense out of them, no one else is going to. You know, you read a book and you say that helps me to understand that, you know?

Steve: On top of that, what we have here is an unrealized asset for humanity, first of all, and secondly, a narrative that goes along with that unrealized asset. And I consider it pretty interesting just considering the events that were localized around this asset. As far as the story of the five years, Jon, the way I tell friends is that this guy and his friends took five years and got this thing together, put it all on 24-Track tape, then the tape was destroyed and this sent Jon, the main guy, off his rocker and he went away for awhile. The rest of the band was so invested and they didn't know and pressed the album in rather a poor method, but the channeling that Jon had in the record is now out and back. And we have the opportunity to... well, it's like the Dead Sea Scrolls, in a way.

Jon: I like your mythology there. It is outsider art. The narrative is such that somebody and his friend or his people—in speaking to his people, he is outside his society. He is observing things and trying to find a way to get well, because he realizes that things are completely upside-down. In the third and fourth movements, it talks about some type of World War event and people live underground. It does go into this science fiction type of world. But it also pokes fun at it, as on *Dirty Heaven*, where it makes fun of things like—out pops a billfold as if it has a mind of its own



and stuff like that. There is a sense of humor— a dark sense of humor— which runs through it. That kind of cracked me up when Steve played it for me. I hadn't heard it in a long time, but when Steve played the remastered version a few weeks ago.....

Frank: Explain what you mean by third and fourth movements. Do you mean the third and fourth sides?

Jon: Yeah. If you look at the liner notes, it explains that **Alien City** is parts one and two of a four movement piece.

Frank: I don't have the liner notes, but okay. That explains it.

Jon: Yeah. One of the tragic things for myself as an artist was the frustration. It was almost like a signal that it just wasn't meant to be.

Steve: It just wasn't ready yet, was the thing. And one of the beautiful things was that the world wasn't ready for it. Everything happened at exactly the right time.....

Jon: I like where you're coming from. I have never thought of it that way, but I like that. I understand that it has become kind of this cult classic and that there are people who really love it. Now that it sounds so much better, it would be great if more people could hear it.

Frank: Let me run this past both of you guys. From a promotional standpoint, because what I write will be not only a review but will promote the whole concept of what is in the album. My conception is to grab the story— not just how it came to be but what is on the vinyl— and at the end of that, not paint a specific picture but a general picture of what the entire story is. As a prelude to possibly music in the future. Would that fit within what you guys perceive?

Jon: Oh, yeah.

Steve: This is a beginning. It's getting down to the runway. Flying into the air, you have no traction, right? For 35 years. Then you are on the runway, have to get off the plane and start working again. That is part of what this is. The other aspect of this, and this is what I envisioned. We need to be above it enough so that we can see our unfolding and what the Universe does back at us.

One of the things this did to me when I started listening to it almost a month ago— and what made me come back to it daily— it has been the soundtrack to my dreams. I dream lucidly and am very aware of my dreams and I sort of know what's going on when I dream, and all of these words and tunes and melodies were communicating while I was asleep. They were communicating a big occult thing of visitation. **Alien City**. Literally, there are people who think that we are in the densest part of the Multiverse and that angels come down and try to bring us up but they forget who they are.

Jon: There you go. What you just said is kind of what is going on here. You have probably seen that movie, **The Man Who Fell To Earth**. I think that was made in '75 or '76. I don't remember exactly when, but I think it was made before **Alien City** came out. The thing is that movie is almost exactly in sync with what **Alien City** is about. You have a situation in which people are striving for enlightenment and you get enlightened but you have to continue your enlightenment because you get dragged down into the world of matter or the world we live in. It's like that whole part on Side Two where the guy is



saying “you consult your magazines when you forget you’re alive.” That whole thing about beings waking up; it’s kind of a Gnostic vision. To try to wake up from all of the lies and the illusions and the fog which surrounds a person, so that you don’t end up becoming your own enemy. You don’t get bogged down. Like you were talking about— that angelic being. An angelic, enlightened person who is put into this world through their sensitivity and their awareness and cannot get the message through. He/she becomes disillusioned, in a way.

Steve: They have to get away.

Jon: Yeah. See, that’s the thing.

Steve: Listening to the songs in order, Frank. It’s so cool because it really does fit. And the beginnings of the songs are so well crafted, you don’t realize that it isn’t just a continuation.

Frank: I was telling Steve earlier, Jon, that I have listened to it but always on random because that’s the way my player is set up and I don’t know how to change it. What I told Steve is that next time around, I am going to listen to the songs in sequence. That will be the first time I will hear the songs in terms of the actual concept.

Jon: Yeah, Steve’s right. It does have a flow and it was orchestrated for that reason. Are you listening through iTunes?

Frank: Windows Media Player. That’s why I have been waiting. I called Steve tonight not realizing that we were going to talk. I have been waiting because I wanted to familiarize myself with the music first. And to hear each track individually. Now that I have familiarized myself, I will go through beginning to end, so the songs will come up in a different sequence. That should be a real eye-opener in terms of what **Alien City** really is. Already, I am impressed with half of the album, musically. It is as good prog as I’ve heard in some time, in terms of the songs. Hearing it in sequence will be interesting.

Jon: I would recommend hearing it in sequence, yes.

Steve: Two things. I want to finish up the angelic theme, traveling down to a dense area. Because I actually relived that. What happened was, in the dream, it was fitting into this teeny little body because you get into this Earth in such a fetal state with just a few cells. You try and fit and you try and remember and it felt like Charlie Brown’s head. It popped up. Like we’re too big for our fetus. Essentially, we have to take nine months and we forget. Then we get bored and think why are we here and that sort of thing just continues to happen and I sort of did this regression. But to this soundtrack. And it resonates so much in that way, it feels like a wakeup call from home, in a lot of ways. It’s like don’t worry, the reason everything is messed up around you is that you’ve forgotten. It’s like Star Wars. Every hero’s journey is an archetypal story in which you have the depth of the ancient ones— the tarot readings and the capabilities of the things, which your studies led you to— the metaphysical studies. This is a metaphysical work. So very much. And that lends it more credibility.

Jon: You have kind of hit on the essence of the album, in a sense.

Steve: And because it’s meaningful, it is critical that we treat it appropriately. And not just pearls before swine in a way. Not too many neon lights and not too much in the way of theatrics because it stands on its own.

Frank: We have to take a step back and look at it as objectively as we can. Which I don’t think for Steve is going to be easy at all. (laughs)

Steve: I'm coming to the objective part. It's the release format. Because if Frank writes up an interesting story, we owe it to the reader to be able to hear these, otherwise they're just going to go to YouTube and listen to the record captures and not the remastered version. I have put this on Soundcloud. Originally, what we were thinking of doing was to do the hot apple pie in the windowsill methodology, which is to expose this through my Soundcloud and open it to the public, because right now it's private, and then put it on Pinterest and let people discover it and allow it to organically grow from there. I think that still is probably a reasonable idea because I don't think, Jon, you are looking at this as a solely commercial release that you are expecting to retire on.

Jon: (laughs) I am not looking at it that way at all.

Steve: So what that means is that we don't have to worry about record labels and getting CDs or records pressed and making sure that everyone buys a copy who wants one. We don't have to do that at this point.

Frank: I understand what you're saying, Steve, but I think that if we go about it right, what you might want to do is make it available on demand. Possibly CD-R. Depending on how this goes, I would like to see a little pamphlet included to explain the whole story behind the music and the concept of the album, if nothing else.

Steve: And the lyrics. That's actually a CD release. We could do a CD release as well. That's interesting because Amazon does have a print-on-demand capability for CDs. My alternative concept was that we would open up Soundcloud so people could hear it, but this is what breaks it. If we do Soundcloud, like all of my other records on Soundcloud, it's for the big song. So people could only hear it from beginning to end. I don't break them up into the tracks which we have set up. We have comments and links to all of the other pages that have the album art and insert and that type of thing to get the depth of the experience. That makes us post-scarcity.

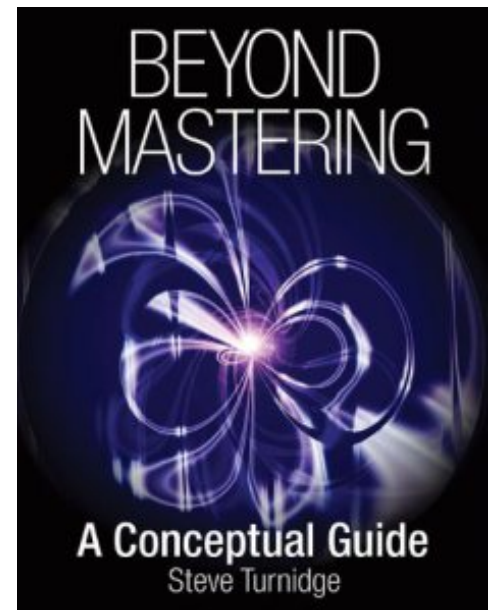
Jon: Remember that all of the musicians we grew up loving, like when Pete Townshend wrote **Tommy** and Ray Davies wrote his concept albums like **Star Maker** and **Preservation**, and practically any Kinks album from that period — the record company labels on which they recorded were always hounding and pestering them. Where's the hit? Where's the song that's going to get radio play. Because when you get down to it, most people are not going to want to sit down and listen to an hour's worth of music. They just aren't. Maybe you and I would because that's what we do. That's where we're at. But there are one or two songs on the album that people can easily connect with. Those can be made accessible and when people want more, they can then enter this world that you're describing. Then eventually, if *Sides Three and Four* ever get produced, you would see how that does spiral and how it kind of completes itself.

Steve: I can see that too. To look farther into the future, if this blows up, there would be such a demand for *Parts Three and Four*.

Jon: If that happens, I will be a happy guy. I would love that. I just don't have the... right now, there is not enough interest to do it.

Frank: Are you presently writing?

Jon: I am always doing things. I just released... I don't know if Steve told you but I have more or less changed gears and switched to instrumental jazz/rock fusion. I have been doing that since 1992. I have not stopped writing music or vocal music, but I have shifted over toward instrumental music. **Alien City** was instrumental to that move, too, because there were so many great themes, like on *Older Men*. The whole idea of what they are saying wasn't words, but music was such a great idea. I was very excited about that when I wrote it. I was explaining to Steve that I definitely had lyrics which were intended to go into that section, but I thought that when the older men are giving you



wisdom, it's not words. It is feelings. It is emotions.

Steve: Every time I listen to that, I get the current message from the older men, and if you had put lyrics in there, you would have locked it down and consigned it to prison, in a way.

Jon: I wasn't aware of that at the time. Because it is such a transcendental thing, you can't put words to it. It has to be an experience. And that's where the function of the eloquence of music without lyrics is so important to me. I've been working and developing on that. In fact, the band that I formed in '95 (and was still producing albums with the material that we recorded until 2000) is called **Mystery School**. We decided to call the band that because, once again, the secret hidden knowledge which is taught— a mystery school was a place you would go to learn about these inner things that were not spoken about and that people didn't understand— the truth behind the truth or behind the lie. So the idea of a band that is expressing things instrumentally and without lyrics, I found very attractive. But I haven't stopped writing vocal songs. I am currently working on an album of songs about madness called **Nervous Wreck**.

Steve: Here's another vision and it is one that has come up and there have been volunteers— I think what would be really cool to honor the Jon Tornbow— to honor the man who came up with this, and to honor this— I think it would be really cool to have a different band and find the right casting to actually play this music— maybe find a 23 year old to play the part of Jon Tornbow, which is the name on the record in the place of Jon Strongbow. Again, putting that on a stage so we can all look at it is really an exciting methodology. It would also allow the newer generations to see themselves talking to themselves. The people I have played this for who have been under 30 have unanimously been knocked out. They resonate with this.

Jon: Cool. Yeah, that could all be developed, but that would take a lot of development and planning.

Frank: It could happen on its own, Jon. This thing will develop its own wheels based upon the credibility of the idea and obviously Steve and I think it is a good idea or we wouldn't spend this much time on it.

Before we get too far out of the way, you guys need to take notes and develop some thoughts and themes around your concepts of not just your story, Jon, but the story which is on the record. Because it may get to a certain point that I decide I want to pursue beyond a short piece or a two page review, I will need your input. Your angles and your visions in terms of everything, because my vision is going to be very limited, believe me. Like I say, I bring what I have heard to it, but everyone needs to bring that. If you guys keep notes and make them available to me when things start popping, it will be a lot better story and will make it an easier story for me to write.

Jon: You haven't received a copy of the libretto yet, then.

Frank: No.

Jon: The music is basically broken into four parts, like I've mentioned before. The first two are the ones that were recorded and are on that album. Those two are broken up into two themes. The first side is "When things are too fast, too soon." The idea behind that is like waking up and understanding that you've been under this kind of societal oppression and have taken it in. The whole idea of information overload is put forth in that.

Frank: So this is the beginning of the awareness?

Jon: Yeah. The first six songs. That first movement is the reaction of a person who comes to an awakening of certain truths that people don't seem to get or are not acknowledging. It should make more sense when you finally get to listen to it in its original sequencing. So the first movement's theme is that



everything is too fast, too soon. The second movement, which is also on **Alien City**, the theme is “When everything is all wrong.” That’s the part which lays out how you’re totally in a sleep and has the one crucially bizarre song about the bombs being dropped and are exploding but are actually just giving you their love. It is a demented song. The first part is understanding and awakening, but the second part really gets into it— where I have Chinas Comidas on there and it is about the systems which are ruling the world and are going to take over your mind.

Steve: That’s the thing. It is a perfectly contemporary story.

Jon: And it goes from there. The side ends with Dirty Heaven, which is kind of the beginning of the resolution of the story. The guy really understands that, yes, things are totally upside down and totally wrong, but hey, we’re alive, you know? That goes into the two other parts, which are not on the album. Part Three is called “When everything is All Right.” That part starts off with a positive understanding. It begins with a person singing this song about how not only are things emotionally disturbing and completely fucked up in terms of communication, but our understanding of the whole physical world is incorrect. I got the idea from a lot of different metaphysical readings at the time— that the sun itself is not hot. It is actually cool and is radiating and we are experiencing it as heat as the waves interact with the protective layers of the Earth. So I wrote this song— the opening of the third movement— this guy is actually living inside the sun, the sun is cool and he is charging himself up in this cool light. It’s really a cool thing. Then it goes into the fogs— he is lamenting that these killer fogs are getting in the way of his relationship with his girl. It gets into some real science fiction stuff and it ends up that this guy takes off all of his clothes and runs with a pack of dogs because society has collapsed.

Then it comes to the final movement, which is: “When Everything is Nothing.” That’s when I lay on the humor and the darkness at the same time. It goes into the concept of sleepwalking your life away and then waking up, and also about waking dreams. That’s why I call the instrumental music I am working on “waking dream jazz.” It’s like being awake— waking up to the fact that, okay, this is what’s happening. You’re still sleeping. You’re still dreaming. All of your heroes are being destroyed, all of your best friends are being undressed and put on display, which is actually something that goes on in the fourth movement. There is a resolution where the guy realizes that he’s walking around and awake and doing the best he can. Which is where it ends. He is a sleepwalker but has this power to understand and see things more clearly. And it clearly becomes a more positive experience. I hope I conveyed something there.

Frank: You worry too much. These are vague concepts that you have thought through to a certain point, but I think we need the music to really finalize it.

If this gets to the point at which Sides Three and Four are optional and in fact viable, are you ready to start from the end of Side Two and put the other two sides together the way you had envisioned, or has your mental processes changed so much over the years that it is going to change into something altogether different?

Jon: That’s a really good question. It’s like what Steve was talking about earlier when he mentioned a time capsule? That is where the music exists now. It’s in a time capsule. Have you ever had a project you were working on that you understood clearly and it was all there and you’re working on it and then you abandon it for one reason or another? Then 20 or 30 or 40 years later, you remember that time and you remember the clarity? The music still exists. It’s still there. When Steve and I listened to the remastering of the original album, I got really excited and went back to the libretto and started reacquainting myself with the other songs. It was like yeah, it’s still there. I still hear it the way I heard it when I was making the whole thing up. That’s what would be fun for me. Connecting with the right musical people and communicating it and putting it all together. It wouldn’t be all that difficult.

Steve: And it will attract people, too. So here is what I am proposing. (stalls) Now I’m the one having a hard time articulating. We can blow the wood off of this thing by going back to my first thought. I could open **Alien City** on Soundcloud to the public. As sort of a soft launch, in a way, and wait for people to discover it. It would start with my Facebook friends, basically, and those kinds of people who are already around me. And your friends, Jon. And sort of let it percolate into their consciousness. Then we can follow up with Frank’s discovery of this thing, which would expose it to the next level. People would be able to hear the entire thing, not the separate songs. Then, as the

feedback comes back, we can gauge the market desire and demand. People asking where they could actually get this. That would be something I could do tonight that would light the fuse to the next stage.

Jon: Well, you have that whole time capsule aspect of it— this thing that was made a long time ago and here it is, rediscovered, like some kind of Egyptian tomb? Some type of archeological find!

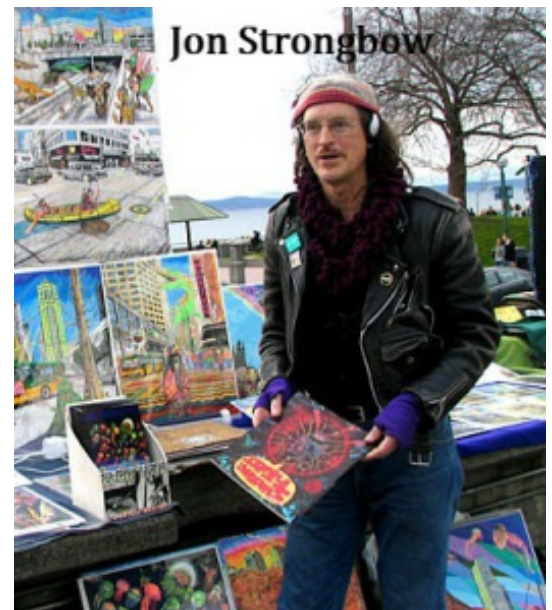
Steve: It is missing a track list. I do that. This is what I do for each of the songs I post on Pinterest. I give the background on how I came across it. I could put a paragraph of that up, sort of softly expose it and you, Frank and Jon, could point those other people at the blogs to it to allow it to start gaining a bit of resonance in the world and see what happens. Frank. Do you think that's too post-scarcity of us?

Frank: What I worry about is time. The main thing being that the amount of time that I have to work on things— I have so many things on the table. What I want is that when I get to that point, I can put up something that is very readable. That is written in a way that people will respond to. My favorite way of writing is "made you look." I don't really care what I write. If I can get people to go there to find out what it is all about, that's what I look for.

I wouldn't want to rush it too much for fear that all three of us would get so bogged down in it that we would become what Jon was talking about. We would be bogged down in the realities of the situation and we really need to stay objective and stay above it for the first little while.

Steve: Navigate appropriately, right?

Frank: Yes. So I would be afraid of rush-releasing it. I like the idea of having it private, but making it private to the people we know will at least visit the site and research the music.



Steve: I've done that already. Frank, you're an example. I have dropped these MP3s probably on a dozen people— Steven Rabow, for instance. Sid Smith from the UK who has connections to the BBC, and a few of my other very discerning friends who have taste and who will realize the importance of this particular piece. So, that's already happening.

Frank: So what do you envision in terms of my side of it. What am I looking at for putting together an article, which would give a really comprehensive look at everything behind the album and the story of the album?

Steve: Jon, stop me if this is going outside your comfort zone. Frank. Do you have the link for the Hightail download page that you used to download the album? If there are a couple of people you think should be made aware of this, we can give you authorization to forward to those people, so you can start sharing with them to get their take on this. I think you know who I'm talking about.

Frank: But we're going to want to put a kibosh on actually hopping on it right away?

Steve: We need to explore near and far away choices. We are defining the continuum of me turning it on in the next minute or holding it for months until Weedshare will come on. This is the other thing, too. I shared this music with John Beezer and he was very excited after being very hesitant. I said when is this going to be ready so we can use this music distribution system because I would love to see this be the fuel to show the world Weedshare.

Frank: So we're looking at how long? Two months?

Steve: Three months. And because the album has been in a time capsule for so long, it is very similar to that South Pole Observatory where they found the twists to the dawn of time and that whole gravity wave thing? They kept it very

very quiet for about six months until they could find exactly the right time to release it. I feel that this is an earthshaking type of a discovery as well. It should be given the same respect.

Frank: That's the problem, Steve. Promoting things online—it is so chaotic out there that you can get a real big push right off the bat and by the next week when you're looking for a follow-up, everyone's already moved on.

Steve: Kind of like a toothpaste tube.

Frank: Exactly. And I would like to avoid that. Especially with something like this. I don't see a tremendously limited audience here. I think it's cerebral enough and musical enough that you should get word of mouth traction off of this for a long time. Maybe it won't be a ton of it, but it should be constant.

Steve: If Jon was on Skype right now, you could see Jon's house. His whole house is like my library and my library is absolutely full.

Frank: Okay, here's what I think. I see this album as a stand-alone. I don't see it fitting in with other labels' projects. It is even outside what Steve has done. Which is why I think Steve is so excited about it. If it does go to Sides Three and Four, you're looking at a stand-alone plus. Something to build on. And you don't have other things getting in the way— all of the other releases.

Jon: Back in the day, we called ourselves **Dog Star Productions**. We were real Sirius, get it? But if you need anything. Like the lyrics and ideas which go along with the songs... Once you see the libretto, it might help you.

It strikes me as curious that you mentioned 1974 because that was the year I had my first experience with a full blown schizophrenic break. You know. Where you get taken in to the psychiatrist and get put in a hospital and given drugs by the pharmaceutical companies. That is where **Alien City** comes from. That experience in '74, which was repeated in kind of a different way in '76. A lot of the ideas that are in **Alien City** come from that sort of outsider place. Just so you get an idea. It will be much more apparent if Sides Three and Four ever get done. It's a crux to the creation of the whole thing. In fact, it's one of my stock lines when people ask me about my mental state or my health. Or they say that they themselves are going crazy. I've talked with a lot of people who come to me at The Market and are at a crossroads in their lives. Obviously, they have a lot of knowingness in their souls and their minds, but they can't seem to get it out, making them more distant from the world. And I happen to know about these things. Shit, I wrote the album. The whole idea is that when you have that way of seeing, you do see things differently, and I tell these people that it's okay to go crazy. Just try to stay away from the psychiatrists, you know? Because they don't know anything. It's good to go crazy. You have to crash through the things you have accepted as truth—the false beliefs—to come to peace with yourself. Then you can be more yourself. That is the positive side of going crazy. I could never end up drooling in a corner inside of some straightjacket. I couldn't, because I am too full of creative energy. I would be bored. I would have to get out of that. I learned very early on how to get out of mental hospitals. You can just fake your way out of them. You say "yes, sir, no, sir" and when they give you the pills to take, you pretend to take them but hold them under your tongue and flush them down the toilet.

End of transcription. As you could tell, the conversation was loose, a first shot at gathering wits about us, you might say. It was exploratory in terms of information, attitude and strategy. And I hope you could tell how much Turnidge and I would like to help Strongbow get his music to the public.

Those of you who have read this far and have an inkling of what this album is, I would ask a favor. Tell your friends about this. Share the conversation and the link I will provide for the music at the end of this paragraph. Follow that link. Listen to the music and, if you like it and have any ideas about what we could do or what we are missing, please let us know. This album has been buried for a long time. It is time to dig it out. Here is the link to the entire album as remastered: <https://soundcloud.com/tags/alien%20city>.

All of Strongbow's musical works are available for sampling here, including three tracks from **Alien City**.
<http://jonstrongbow.com/music.html>.

Now, a message from our sponsor—

Notes..... The news out of **Green Monkey Records**, next to the publicity around **The Queen Annes** (**MOJO Magazine** has discovered it) and **Slam Suzanne** (who appears to be **On the Floor With Your Mom**) is that prexy **Tom Dyer** is sliding into his alternate identity as musician and working on tracks for his upcoming **History of NW Rock Vol. 1** album. Thus far, he has admitted to recording *She's Boss* (**The Dimensions**), *Louie Louie* (**The Nomads**), *Walk Don't Run* (**The Ventures**), *The Witch* and *You've Got Your Head On Backwards* (**The Sonics**), *I Want To Hold Your Hand* (**Tiny Tony & The Statics**), *Angel of the Morning* (**Merrilee Rush**), and *Little Wing/Spanish Castle Magic* (**Jimi Hendrix**). What that means as to arrangements or sounds is anybody's guess. Dyer has spent a lifetime attempting to be an enigma when it comes to his (and other people's) music. He has mostly succeeded. I'm sure that whatever he comes up with is going to be interesting, at the very least. Here is a version of *The Witch* taken from his **I Ain't Blue Anymore** album:



I have been hyping the Portland band which is **Morning Ritual** for some time now. Here is a video by a band fronted by two sisters who are part of the Ritual— **The Shook Twins**. I dig these ladies!

The Green Pajamas recorded *Cristina Dancing* as a tribute to dancer **Cristina Hoyos**. In what can only be labeled a dream sequence, here is Christina dancing to, uh, the song. And what an outstanding song it is.

Her name is **Jini Dellaccio** and I knew her but didn't realize it when I was growing up amidst the classic Pac Northwest bands of the sixties. I would see posters and newspaper articles and albums by NW bands and while thrilled with the aura of it all not realize that the pictures I was seeing were taken by Dellaccio— images of bands and artists from **The Sonics** to **The Fabulous Wailers** and beyond. It has just been brought to my attention by good friend **Jamie Brown** that a film has been made/is being made and a kickstarter campaign is winding down. I wish I had known earlier and I would have pulled out all the stops for a full-on look at the many people behind the music and artists back then, but there is only time to let you know in the hopes that the kickstarter goal is reached. [Click here](#) and check out what an amazing talent Dellaccio was and how important she was to the whole Pac NW music scene of her time. This is a documentary I would love to see in its entirety with all of the music from the bands she captured in Black & White. This is a scene I not only lived but still believe is as important to rock music history as any out there. Again, [click here](#)! And [here](#)! And [here](#)! They're all the same page. I'm just making a point.

Jini Dellaccio



Drummer **Matt Chamberlain** has played on more than a few songs which planted me on my ass. I'm not really sure what to think about this other than the fact that you never really know what to expect from him. His drumming with **Jess Pillmore** (on her **Reveal** album) and on **Dan Phelps/Viktor Krauss/Matt Chamberlain's Modular** set me back on my heels. Now, this:

Damn! Had a chance to see **Run Boy Run** at the **Axe & Fiddle** in Cottage Grove but just found out about it as they were taking the stage tonight. Sorry I'm missing this one!

What do they call World Music these days? When I worked in records, it was International. Regardless, friend **Paul Hood** of **The Toiling Midgets** turned me onto a label which has a FREE sampler for downloading. Not your standard ranch stash, for sure, but intriguing at the very least. I downloaded it and am damn impressed! The label is **Six Degrees Records** and you can download the sampler [by clicking on this](#). Thanks, Paul!

God, but I love it when I discover someone early and get to watch them progress! I've been following **Phoebe Bridgers** for awhile now and she just keeps growing. You should check out all of the tracks you can find. You can start here.

And as long as we're on the subject, here is one from over a year ago.

It's like summer outside and I have this urge to rock out a bit. Here is a video of some guys from Seattle back in the eighties. I told these guys that there was already a band out there with the name **The Heaters** but they wouldn't listen. True, the band was defunct by that time, but they had recorded and released a 45 and possibly an album on Ariola America. By the time this band got any traction, they had finally changed their name to **The Heats**. They rocked!

=FGJ=

Frank's column appears every Tuesday

Contact us at dbawis@rogers.com

"Frank Gutch Jr. looks like Cary Grant, writes like Hemingway and smells like Pepe Le Pew. He has been thrown out of more hotels than Keith Moon, is only slightly less pompous than Garth Brooks and at one time got laid at least once a year (one year in a row). He has written for various publications, all of which have threatened to sue if mentioned in any of his columns, and takes pride in the fact that he has never been quoted. Read at your own peril."

