



Lucid Dreams, Sonic Cocoon

*Inside Steve Tibbetts
and Marc Anderson*

*interview by
billy WAWSAW*

Back in my middle ages, 1979-ish, my friend Kevin and I were toasted-stoned, blurring in the dark second story of another late college night, imaging in my Yucatan hammock. Erasing *Point* beers; feeding on Steve Tibbett's first self-produced/released record, *YR* (which was later re-released by ECM). If there was an *Oz*, we had found him crying.

Today, this super-human duet grows a massive alchemic blend; a psycho-spiritual slam combo of

"Charlie Manson riffs", rain forest ragas that make these sonic artists not quite new age or ambient types, and only partially rock'n'rollers. Call them "electronic folk painters." Tibbetts and Anderson are sound explorers, wired and wandering the global and mind, hammering and restitching. A mystical union key.

Anderson is finishing his first solo project, unsigned as of yet. The duo are working on their fifth ECM record that incorporates drum rhythms from Tibbetts' voyage to Bali and Indonesia, including his field recordings of Gamelan music.

bw: Did you custom engineer some of your gear, like the foot pedals?

ST: I just put together the pieces that were already

there. I designed the sends and receives, but it's nothing new. Being able to do on stage with my feet, what you'd normally do with your hands, in the studio with a mixer.

bw: Why do you double mike your acoustic guitars with Markley pick-ups?

ST: Because the internal pick-up sounds really good in the house (mix), but feeds back when put into the digital delay. So I use the Markley pick-up for the digital effects.

bw: Marc, you said during your recent show that you found a new way to play the steel drum; with your hands.

MA: Right. Although as I play it the drum is slowly going out of tune. This isn't the first time that Steve has convinced me to do something that I didn't

think I should do.

bw: How do you approach your team creativity in the studio? Do you have any special communication habits, or techno-rituals?

ST: Yeah. Usually this is going to be the kind of computer disk, music clichés that you could boot up and it would come out that way. It's the same collaborative process that happens between two artists in the studio. If I have an idea, I try to flesh it out enough to jump start it for Marc.

Sometimes, if I come in to an idea that Marc has early on, it's too easy to shoot it down. That's why we try to keep things to ourselves for a while. I'm talking about pieces that originate in the studio now; then it's hit or miss, going up one-way streets and hitting brick walls.

Finally there's a nice place where the piece seems to take over itself and dictates what happens. Our minds naturally ornament this process by talking about the moviescape, the landscape, or the plotline. All these are just ways of keeping things rolling.

bw: Is it hard to verbalize in this sonic landscape?

MA: I don't think so. We sometimes come up with very different descriptions, or images, of music or

sounds. All it is, is a way to think about it. Like Steve said, each song ends up never really being about anything in particular. We have developed a language that has nothing to do with storylines, but with colors and sounds that are unique to our experience and vision. This happens after the piece has taken on a life of its own; when it suggests things to us.

ST: Using a kind of painterly imagery; these labels, like soundscape or plotlines, become a crutch, and seem to work well in communication of our music to people, because of their own imagery or "great visualizations" from the songs. It's like pouring gas somewhere. Someday, someone is going to come along and drop a match! We build a scaffolding at the beginning, which is discarded at a certain

point, but the sap seems to carry-over into most listener's minds.

bw: So when you title a song, or an album...

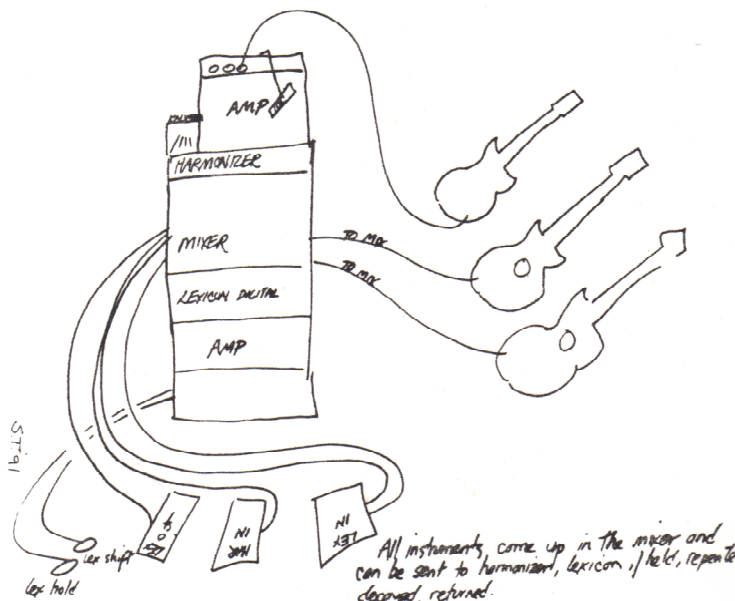
MA: ...or when ECM does it!

bw: Some controversy here Steve...?

ST: I spent a drunk night in Kathmandu, drinking Cognac, reading James Joyce, and listing album titles for a letter to ECM. I quickly sent a follow-up letter saying please disregard previous letter. And I have copies of both of them. I know I didn't fuck this one up. It's all water under the bridge now.

bw: Do you utilize your dreams in your song writing?

MA: No. My dreams tend to be very mundane, so it's a good thing I don't use them! A previous inter-



viewer said that we should use lucid dreaming, which is a method of waking up in your dreams. To work within your dreams.

ST: He suggested that after we were in a lucid dream, walk into a room with a radio, walk over to the radio and say: "I'd like to hear my new record," and then turn it on! This guy had really large pupils; he looked like he was scanning for ships. He looked like he was in a lucid dream at that moment!

bw: I ask this question because I'm interested in sonic symbols and archetypes. Perhaps similar to Jung's symbolic archetypes. It's not a hot question.

ST: It's a hard one.

bw: Tell me about your goals as a professional musician.

ST: In the last ten years, I've felt like I was in a 12 Step Program, taking it one day at a time. When I was in my twenties, I thought I wanted to come back and sell-out the St. Paul Civic Center! Things like that!

bw: Are you in a 12 step program too, Marc?

MA: Actually, now I'm more goal-oriented than in years past. I'm interested in performing and touring

more, with Steve and some other groups that I work with.

bw: Who else are you working with?

MA: I'm producing a sort of pop-jazz performer named Michael Monroe. I also work with a traditional West African Ensemble, and a free jazz orchestra, and sometimes with an art-rock group called *Spangalang*. I'd love to produce some traditional Ghanaian flute music with a friend from Ghana. I've been involved with a couple of different theatre projects recently. One at a dinner theater called The Illusion Theater. And I like to write more music for theater.

bw: Steve, do you ever experience a musical vision while carrying-out some everyday task, like buttering toast, or when exercising, a duality of experiencing that might be a part of your creative process?

ST: It happens when I'm running or bicycling sometimes.

bw: Something clicks...?

ST: Yeah. Perhaps when your mind is in a resting state; it happens then. It also happens at odd spots, like driving. Your field of vision is really filled up and your body is concerned with keeping your car on the road. Sometimes

this can free-up a certain part of your mind which seems to then click in.

bw: Is this a higher consciousness for you?

ST: No. But there are different levels of consciousness.

bw: Is music inherently spiritual?

MA: Music is *potentially* spiritual. But much music isn't coming from a very spiritual space. I can't judge whether my work is, or isn't, spiritual for others.

bw: Is it spiritual for you personally?

MA: Yeah. It's a healing thing, and without getting stupid and sappy about it, virtuous as well. We're not building bombs! A guy told us after our Chicago show that he had not experienced such a powerful musical performance in years. I recall shows that I was changed in similar, radical ways. About 20 years ago, I saw a Paul Winter Concert and I was amazed.

ST: You would have to first define music...

BW: Your music, then...?

ST: No, that's too close to home. In fact, if you want to be analytical about this, any phenomena has the to be self-liberating. There's an old analogy about throwing any snake up in

the air. If you throw it high enough it will completely uncoil itself. On a more mundane level, I agree with Marc. There is music that will not lift you up; that will not create more space in your life, but there is music that can and some that intends to lift you, but has the opposite effect.

bw: How do you compare natural, or acoustic sounds with man-made, or electric sound?

ST: On an absolute level, there is no difference. Oh, god! Let's not talk on an absolute level!

bw: Absolutely! How do you choose between the two?

ST: Acoustic sounds have more overtones. There is more potential to play with and they seem to ask...

MA: They breath more...

ST: Right. And they ask to be built upon more than electronic sources. Electric guitar doesn't ask for anything except to high in the mix...

bw: Amped up...?

ST: Yeah.

bw: Have you ever considered yourself as a shaman on stage in a ceremony of music?

MA: No. From my reading, there seems to be an historical connection between drumming and shamanism,

but I don't think of myself in this way.

ST: Not on a stage. A shaman is usually someone who has gone through a wrenching life experience that evokes a spirit, and then comes back to the community to heal and counsel. This hasn't happened to me. I'm a mixing console shaman! We are attempting to invoke something of course, but we're not animists, we don't give it a name. We don't (leave) offerings out. But we're certainly attempting to invoke something from part of our minds and then again on tape. Then we know we have the mix correct. We've done our "bogus shaman thing."

bw: Is music eternal?

MA: That's a tough one. I hope that I'm involved in something that goes beyond human.

bw: I keep playing with this phrase: "sound alchemy." What is alchemy to you?

ST: Alchemy is trying to polish a turd.

bw: In *The Power of Myth*, Campbell explains that a hero is a person who undertakes an arduous journey and returns to communicate his/her new knowledge. Are you heroes?

(Steve had just returned from Indonesia, and Marc

from Africa — bw)

ST: It was on a plane. I had the vegetarian meal. I read the inflight magazine. When I walked off the steaming tarmac in Indonesia, I was with very large German and Italian tourists who all had state-of-the-art Nikons around their necks and we didn't feel like heroes. But this is something to aspire to. To make this journey mentally or physically. It's good to do both. And you can do it now without a whole lot of discomfort. You don't have to be Ulyeuss!

MA: That this communication can occur is a wonderful thought. I'd love to be a part of (a hero's journey). You have brought up a new idea for me. I know that some artists have been important to me, in that they have transformed me in certain ways.

ST: I don't think that heroes think of themselves as heroes.

MA: Right.

bw: Do you remember any myths or fairy tales from your childhood?

ST: Yes. When I was in third grade, I had surgery on my eyes and I was blind for three weeks. While I was in the hospital, my parents read The Jungle Book and the Just So stories over and over. I can recall their voices; I can almost recite them today!

MA: I remember myself as a mother reading me Mother Goose.

bw: Is it reasonable to suggest that your records, and rock music in general, are forming a new collection of folk tales or songs for this epoch?

TS: That's your domain. Although, while not conservatory-trained musicians, we often take a folk-like attitude. In other words...

MA: I think that we are making folk songs and we lean on folk traditions from all over the world.

bw: Perhaps the question is rather, are we fusing, or replacing, folk material from the past with new musical materials from today?

ST: What music?

bw: *Talking Heads* music...?

MA: No. I think movies do that.

ST: *Ninja Turtles*....

bw: Is Christianity a myth or a fact in your life?

ST: I guess I'd have to rewind to Joseph Campbell and say that it's a metaphor, not a myth. It's the same story told in a different way.

bw: Do you utilize ancient sounds or musical patterns?

ST: We don't set out to use

head! There are sounds that we hit upon that seem to conjure up ancient pyramids in Babylon, but that's just garbage coming up from your mind. However, it's fun to attach that image to a sound and say, use the ancient ziggurat's sound in a section. And when we boot up the sampler, the disk will say "ziggurat" on it because it sounds old.

MA: And the groove that works the best, this is maybe back to the folk song thing, Steve has asked me to find a groove that sounds like it was written 600 years ago. These song patterns have been through so many minds, but they change so slowly. They are just, "there." So set...

ST: You can't change the bell line...

MA: No, you can't. I'm definitely looking for a groove that doesn't sound like some Midwestern guy just made it up on an afternoon!

bw: What traditions have you carried on from your folks?

ST: Jamming with them! The first thing I do is play tunes with my parents. An appreciation of animal life. Gosh! I'm such an amalgam of my folks. Sometimes I'll look in the mirror and see my Dad's

MA: My Mom sings. Because I'm a parent now, I see this parent sibling thing differently. I sometimes say verbatim, the same things that my parents said to me 25 years ago. I am not a Christian, and I've definitely changed my diet.

bw: I want to propose something called a "sound bank" to you. Have television, rock music, and personal stereos reduced or changed our ability to appreciate different sounds?

ST: I think that TV, by nature, tends to narrow your consciousness down. Sometimes this is nice, like on Sunday evening. A walkman does this same kind of narrowing.

MA: I think that the ability to listen subtly is diminishing. It became apparent to me when I met people who spoke in tonal languages and I just couldn't hear the tonal changes!

bw: What is new age music?

ST: Music dead from the neck down!

MA: I don't know what it is! It's a label. Much of it is pap, bullshit, doodling. But there are good artists out there that end up being labeled new age.