

JAY GRAYDON & RANDY GOODRUM INTERVIEW

"JaR, Scene 29" - OCTOBER 2008

by Will Minting

Will: JaR – a new supergroup is born! With your combined careers, you've accomplished a phenomenal quantity and diversity of credits on seminal albums over the last four decades. It was an honour to be asked to do this interview for the release of your "Scene 29" CD, thanks guys. Readers will think I'm bound to say this but I really do love this album. I still get sent a lot of CD's and only have time to play a few, and yours exceeded my highest expectations! How did you hook up and when did you decide to write and record together? I realise that you have a lot of mutual friends.

Jay: Thanks for the kind words, Will. We met at a songwriters seminar in Arizona somewhere back in the 80's. A few years later, Randy moved to LA and we ended up writing a hit song entitled, "Who's Holding Donna Now". Over the years we kept writing from time to time and to get up to date.

Randy: Greetings from across the Pond, Will. As Jay mentioned, we met at a songwriting seminar in Phoenix, Arizona in 1980. I was living in Nashville at the time, however I was preparing to move to Connecticut, as my early hits were all pop hits: You Needed Me, Bluer Than Blue, It's Sad To Belong, etc. and Nashville wasn't where I needed to be to go to the next level of acceptance. Jay, David Foster, Bill Champlin, and others were on the panel and Jay and David reached out to me, musically, and we struck up instant friendships. Over the years, Jay and I worked on various projects, mainly as co-writers for projects he was producing.

Will: Great! So, with Jay being in Los Angeles and Randy being in Nashville, how did you set about songwriting? Did you sit down together or did you each work at your own studios and send data to each other?

Jay: Randy was making a trip to LA so we got together as to compose. I had an idea for a chorus melody and chord changes for what turned out to be "Your Heartbreak". As in typical Randy fashion, Randy sat down at the keyboard (Yamaha Motif using a Fender type Rhodes sound) and came up with a very cool verse quickly! I think it was the next night of writing when Randy said we should make a record together. That was the beginning of JaR. Randy came back to LA a few more times during the project. Some stuff was written via data sends such as, Call Donovan and maybe Scene 29 as well.

Randy: Jay and I followed the same pattern we've always followed. Ideally gather at his piano in his studio to hammer out the basic shape of the song(s). I almost always do the lyrics for songs we write, although Jay has great concepts, premises, hook phrases, etc. so I'm always tuned into what's flying around the room when we write. We prefer the organic, hands on the keyboard approach as opposed to playing a loop and building a song that way. When we start the programming of the track, scratch vocals, etc. quite often the music demands that we make alterations and major course changes, however Jay and I have very deep musical vocabularies and well as an appreciation for the simple essence, so what we end up with is a true musical middle ground that neither of us can get to without the other.

Will: Right. Your record company's Press Release mentioned that your collaboration might remind listeners of Steely Dan. Of course, Jay infamously performed the Peg solo on Steely Dan's Aja album which other legendary session guitarists hadn't quite managed to nail to Fagen & Becker's exacting standards. Did you set out to achieve this type of sound, or is this the vibe that your collaboration naturally brought about?

Jay: Randy is so flexible as to any style meaning the record could have gone in other musical directions. I was responsible for the Steely type of influence but note it is a very loose reference as we have a different sound. The comparison is based on quality pop with some jazz influence and lyrics that are brilliant. Randy wrote the lyrics! I would like to note something about Steely. The first time I heard a record of theirs, my first thought was these cats write like I do! The bottom line is I was never trying to sound like them, more like we think along the same musical lines.

Randy: People may think that we're paying homage to Steely Dan, however nothing could be further from the truth. This music, JaR, is who we are. I am baffled that there haven't been more groups that, as Mitchell Cohen dubbed it, create an "intelligent pop" end result.

Will: Perhaps many try! You have both amassed an array of Billboard hits as writers, musicians and producers. Which moments of each others careers do you most admire?

Randy: I was floored when I heard some of Jay's work with the Manhattan Transfer. He single handedly changed the discipline with that work. Of course, the constant, pristine quality of his productions with Al Jarreau, George Benson, and others was the bar from whence all music of that genre is judged. When I met him in Phoenix in 1980 I was already completely knowledgeable of his work and a big fan.

Jay: When I first heard Randy sing Bluer than Blue, I told Randy I love that song!!! It holds up like a standard!!! So much great stuff from Randy. The Steve Perry album he produced is fantastic!!!

Will: Absolutely! What are your favourite memories of the recording sessions? Were there any rituals or humorous anecdotes that you'd be prepared to share?

Randy: My favorite moment of the record, the most amusing, that is, was while Jay and I were working on the track, Glen's Hair. Normally I go off somewhere and write the lyrics and email, or bring them to Jay in person. In some cases, as in this particular track, I may need to write additional lyrics on the spot. That was the case with Glen's Hair. We needed a few lines and I wanted something really special. I came up with the line, "are your follicles dead?" Jay nearly fell out of his chair laughing. I'll never forget that.

Jay: There was only one little thing that was recorded when we were together in my studio. All of Randy's stuff was recorded in Nashville and I was never there. The same for me as I recorded my stuff in my studio and Randy was not there except for the following. When we wrote Scene 29 (a song based upon film noir of the 40's and some other stuff), we came up with an idea to hire an impressionist that could do Bogart, James Cagney, Edward G Robinson, and Hitchcock. After legal investigation, we found out using a likeness for someone famous needs licensing. Not practical so since Randy can do many cool voices, Randy did the two voices in the song at the point where the band stops after the guitar solo. We were laughing big time as this came together and this was the only moment we were in the studio at the same time recording!

Will: Many accomplished musicians seize up when the red recording light is switched on. As you are both highly respected for your mastery of recording studios, what is the secret to nailing a take?

Jay: Not seizing up. <g> When the red light comes on, it is time to simply do what we do.

Randy: I always record everything, never do a practice run. Quite often the first take is the best, even after many additional ones. I remember playing keyboards on a Steve Perry record, Street Talk, and nearly every track that was kept was the first take. The thing about early takes is that there is a magic that is transferred to tape when the musician is discovering and communicating with the other instruments for the first time.

Will: What tips would you give to those of us who haven't managed to capture our better musical moments?

Jay: If asking how to capture your best musical moments, record many takes and bounce the best stuff to a master track.

Randy: I agree with Jay. You never know what may happen or where you are on the continuum unless you make many takes. Just don't "walk past the money", as Quincy Jones said once. In other words, don't discount earlier takes, just because they were early ones.

Will: Great advice! I gather that between the two of you, you recorded most of the tracks yourselves. What instruments and recording facilities did you use for "Scene 29"?

Jay: The instruments are the same for many of the songs. Note that Randy and I have identical setups for the main sounds as we do things using midi files. Keyboards: Akoustic Piano Bardstown Audio's Bosendorfer . The Rhodes sound is Yamaha Mofif. Drums: Superior drums (Toontrack) was used for 99% of the drum stuff. Bass: Trilogy (Spectrasonics). Guitars. Bossa (Jay Graydon signature) for the solo stuff and some clean sounds. Valley Arts strat for most of the clean stuff. Ibanez George Benson for "Esquire" (Freddie Green style and maybe for a few licks). The guitar amp is not typical. I used the original Vox Tonelab desktop model for all guitar parts.

Will: The guitar sounds are wonderful but the fluid playing helps! More on your solos later. Did you have any difficulty synchronising your recording facilities?

Jay: Randy uses LOGIC as his sequencer and recorder. I use Pro Tools HD3 for my sequencer and recorder and the audio goes through my NEVE. As final audio comes from Randy, I add it in the Pro Tools session as the CD is mixed in my studio.

Randy: Even though we used 2 different programs to sequence and record audio: Jay-Pro Tools, and me; Logic Pro, we still were able to use the same instrument programs, e.g.: Akoustic Piano, and Bardstown Audio's Bosendorfer for Piano, Yamaha Motif for Rhodes, Superior Drums for virtually all drums and percussion, Trilogy for Bass, and a few extra patches and/or additions from my or Jay's personal setup. Jay would record his guitars, vocals, etc. in his studio and I would record my vocals, etc. in mine. I have an ftp site which is what we used to send large audio files back and forth. Also I made numerous trips to LA to program, record, etc. Since midi is the language of programming, it was very simple to work in 2 locations. It helps to have a good, long-standing work relationship in place before you do something like this for obvious reasons.

Will: The production is striking. Not just the arrangements and the tones but also the dynamics you achieved, even without acoustic drums or conventional electric bass. You explained in the CD sleeve liner notes that whilst other albums are over-compressed, you sought to achieve the dynamic range of everyday life.

Jay: As to dynamics, we played real time parts and sequenced parts as to have natural dynamics and did not destroy the dynamics by compressing/limiting the master mix. Note compressors were used in the recording process but individually as to individual

instruments so as to add "punch" to the sound and/or slightly "even-out" some of the levels WITHOUT hurting the natural dynamics of the complete sonic picture.

Will: "Jeff Baxter's 'stache down past his chin, he talks the trash and knows the spin, call Donovan". What did Skunk do now? Who's Donovan?

Randy: Jeff Baxter has a particular, unique moustache that many people are familiar with. Artistic license was the reason for using that descriptive phrase. Now, about Donovan: That's the name of the Cyrano de Bergerac-type advisor to the main character of the song. Donovan has the uncanny ability to recommend just the right solutions for the klutzy manoeuvres the singer is going through.

Will: In Esquire, you sang "A hand shake that feels like you're holding a fish...talks for a living with his forked tongued 1-800-SLEEZE". You had a bad experience with a lawyer, Randy?

Randy: This is not about my personal experience, rather someone else's that I work very closely with. I did a little method-acting when writing that lyric.

Jay: Let's say once upon a time I was involved in a hideous drawn out civil suit that was a nightmare. The opposing lawyer acted more like a thug than a lawyer. I baited Randy with details and Randy nailed the lyric!!!

Will: Other than the striking production and the evocative lyrics, the playing is magnificent! The tasteful piano playing, and the fluid and exceptional guitar solos in particular made me smile throughout listening! How do you continue to conceive such brilliant ideas after so many years of making hit records?

Randy: Jay and I came up listening to the same kinds of music and both steeped in the philosophy of jazz, in that the greatest fun is in the original spontaneity, especially when it's a conversation amongst a group of players when performing. Jay and I use that same spontaneous philosophy when we work together, in all aspects; writing, playing, singing, recording, etc. The end result is very infectious to the listener.

Jay: Randy stated it perfectly!!! The following may be of interest. During the end of "The Cabo Cad", Randy and I traded solos while in two different states! We decided to play one 8-bar section at a time meaning I played the first 8 bars and then sent the audio file to Randy as to play the next 8 bars. Randy did so and then sent me his audio file and I played the next 8 bars and so on. When listening to the solo trade offs, it is quite obvious we are feeding off each others previous solo phrase often.

Will: Come on, musicians will be listening to your solos, scratching their heads thinking "huh, how did he do THAT?" <g> The solos in "Cure Kit" are classic – to my ears, right up there with Kid Charlemagne, Josie and the classics! But how DID you do it? Hahaha.

Jay: Man, that is a nice compliment as one of my favorite solos is Larry Carlton's Kid Charlemagne solo. Btw, on the Cure Kit guitar solo, there is one line that is impossible to play. A note bends down and then bends down again to another note without an attack. I did this trick like 25 years ago on a Mark Jordan album I produced on the song, Blue Desert (I think). I heard the line in my head and then played the first bent up note then bent down to normal pitch (sustaining way longer than needed). I then punched in the same note but "Bent Up" to the same pitch and punched in. I then bent down that note. I performed this until the punch was seamless. Hey, such are the benefits of recording.
<g>

Randy: I purposefully tried to mess with the sound of the Hammond B3 in order to match the attitude of the subject in the lyrics. It begged to be scraped around, like the entrance lick. That was a fun one; as a matter of fact they all were "fun ones".

Will: Do you have any plans to tour in support of "Scene 29"?

Jay: Not at this point but maybe in the future.

Will: Amongst other mutual friends, you've both substantially influenced Toto and in particular Steve Lukather. Jay helped Luke get a foot in the session recording scene back in the mid 1970's, and Randy produced Luke's recent "Ever Changing Times" album. It was great to see Jay at Luke's recent gig in LA, amongst other guests including Steve Vai, Alex Van Halen, and other members of Toto.

Jay: Always great to see the guys! Note Luke played his ass off and the band sounded great!!!

Randy: Bill Schnee introduced me to Luke. Actually he gave me one of Luke's melodies on a tape, I wrote lyrics for it, Luke loved it and we started co-writing on the spot. That was great for me because Luke is one of my all-time favorite writers to work with. He plays and lyrics start pouring out. Bear in mind, I've said a lot about lyrics, but I also write music. As a matter of fact, my early hits were solo written by me. Back to Luke, once, after I wrote I'll Be Over You with Luke I asked him to play the demo in David Paich's studio control room to see if it sounded like it did in my studio. I was living in Studio City, CA at the time and David Paich and I just happened to have the same kind of hybrid NS10 speakers. I never meant to pitch the song to Toto because I assumed they didn't use outside writers. The way I understand it, Toto was rehearsing in the next room and Luke went in, played it, and some of the other Toto guys heard it, loved it, and decided to cut it. Nice accident, eh?

Will: Luke told me that he loved Scene 29, and that he'd been waiting for it a long time!

Jay: Luke called me again tonight raving about the CD. Man, that makes all the work worth the effort!!!

Will: You chose to release "Scene 29" on Zink Music. One of your label buddies is Peter Friestedt who recently released LA Project 2, for which Randy wrote and performed along with other luminary vocalists and musicians including Bill Champlin, Joseph Williams, Abe Laboriel and John "JR" Robinson. To my ears, this is amongst the finest AOR releases of recent years. Randy, please could you tell us about your involvement with this project?

Randy: I regularly go to Stockholm to write; usually once a year. On one of my trips my publisher introduced me to Peter and he gave me a song to put lyrics to. I loved the music and have been a huge fan of Peter since. I really love the new Peter Friestedt record. The painstaking effort is quite evident. The performances are excellent and the songs are great. I feel fortunate to have a couple of my best tunes ever on that record!

Will: It's been a pleasure, and there's so much in your CD that I know it'll be in my CD player for a long time to come. Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

Jay: Randy and I are very proud of our work and we hope the listeners will love it. We did a video for the song "Your Heartbreak" a few days ago. We finished a night early and since Randy was in LA, we decided to write a new JaR song for the next album. We wrote a ballad and I must say this song gives me goose bumps every time I listen to the demo

Randy played and sung!!! Man, I love working with Randy writing such quality music!!!!
Randy and I will get together in January as to work on new JaR songs - that will be fun!!!

Randy: If all you listeners out there buy a few copies, we would be even more inspired!
Thanks for the interview and the kind words, Will.

Thanks to Kerstin Olofsson for the CD, and to Stefan Polzer at Zink Music for releasing all
the great albums in recent times. For further information, visit www.jarzone.com,
www.jaygraydon.com and www.randygoodrum.com

Will Minting, October 2008

www.myspace.com/willminting

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