

Q & A interview By Michelle Delio

Tell me a bit about your background, Gary – did anything in your childhood lead to you making music?

I remember one time, I was probably fourteen, I had a tape of Skynard's *Sweet Home Alabama*. I told my great uncle Don that I was in a band and we had recorded a demo song that I wrote and wanted him to hear. Uncle Don was a brilliant guy but that brilliance did not stretch to music. We went out to his Ford Ranger and I popped in the tape for him and the famous "bump-bump" guitar intro began. He listened for a minute and turned to me with sheer amazement in his eyes. He thought it was incredible, which of course it was and is.

After I saw how proud he was I didn't have the courage to tell him the real story. We got out of the truck and he just shook his head in awe. He's in Heaven, probably laughing right now. But for me it was a taste of what it must be like to write a hit song... a song that moved people. I've been working toward that goal ever since.

So when did you start making your own music, rather than playing Skynard's stuff for poor Uncle Don?

I've always been into making music... as long as I can remember. I'd jam with friends, dreaming of getting a group together. Those garage band dreams that a lot of guys have. I didn't seriously start writing music until I was in college, back in 1992. I'd moved from Los Angeles up to Northern California. My dad bought me a 12 string acoustic guitar for my birthday. I took some lessons and started putting my own melodies over standard chord progressions. Nothing too sophisticated, but I was writing my own songs... lots of them.

A few years later, I began to write tunes with a friend. Richard and I would stay up till all hours strumming, singing, drinking, smoking... just really exploring new musical roads. For me, it was an explosion of creativity. My song *The Sun Always Shines* – that placed second in the International Songwriting Competition – is about that period in my life and my musical collaboration with Richard. "When you turn back the time, the sun always shines." It's genesis is a wistful remembrance of the past.

I know the International Songwriting Competition is one of the most prestigious competitions in the world, judged by some of the top musicians and music executives from some of the world's largest labels. The New York Times calls it THE competition to watch. Were you nervous about entering? Did you think you'd win?

The ISC was never about winning for me. You just kind of close your eyes and hope for the best. The whole "nothing ventured, nothing gained" thing. There were over 11,000 entries and that's a lot of talented musicians and great songs. The ISC would send me an email every once in a while to indicate

continues...

that my song had moved up to the semi-finals, quarter finals, then to the top ten. My mom (you know how moms are) got so excited when she found out that my song was one of the ten finalists. She dreamed that I'd placed second, but was afraid to tell me. As it turned out, her dream came true. It was a rush and a noteworthy accomplishment to have had one of the winning entries.

People have said your music sounds like 60's Britpop but with a stronger, slightly darker beat. Do you agree?

The term Britpop was coined in the nineties by some journalist describing the resurgence of the British music scene – groups like Oasis and Blur. I don't know if the term bothers me. I've come to accept it as a sort of genre like heavy metal. Is all my stuff Britpop? No, hardly. But as a descriptive word I think it fits rather well. I just make music that's appealing to me, and hope that others like it too.

You've chosen to distribute and promote your own work primarily online, at least for now. How does this new way of making music available benefit musicians?

The Internet has revolutionized the music industry in so many ways. Online distribution through great companies like CD Baby [www.cdbaby.com] has given independent musicians like me a platform to reach people all over the world. In fact, I just sent a copy of my new CD to Spain. Without the Internet that would not have been possible. So the benefits are enormous.

Are there any drawbacks to self-representation and online distribution?

Aside from the obvious like piracy, the proliferation of new artists and music has made it extremely difficult to stand out. For example, I think CD Baby gets something like 3,000 CDs a month added to its website. How can people sift through it all to find what they're looking for? They really can't.

What are you working on now?

I'm four songs in to a new album. I hope it's going to blow people away. The songs I'm working on now are very different from *The Coast Is Clear*. More of an edge, a bite. There are also some very beautiful ballads to mix it up. I'm not into albums that package every song to sound the same as the one before. That's one of the things that I felt was so special about the Beatles. Part of their combined genius was the different feel and sound of each number, especially in the latter years.

If you were being shipped off to the proverbial desert island what CDs would you take with you?

Ah, the proverbial desert island. Hmmm let's see... all the Beatles albums, of course. Oasis: *Morning Glory*, The Bee Gees: *The Best Of*, Radiohead: *OK Computer*, The Verve: *Urban Hymns*, Elton John: *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, Travis: *The Man Who*, Coldplay: *A Rush of Blood To the Head*, The Beach Boys: *Pet Sounds*... is time up yet? Pink Floyd: *The Wall*, some early Stones, The Kinks, The Who. If it could only be one CD, though, it would have to be The Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour*.

What do you do for fun when you're not making music?

I knit and watch Matlock.

Ummmm.... really?

No.

Seriously, I like to be outdoors. Hiking and snow-boarding in the Sierras which are practically in my backyard. I've traveled to Europe but my next adventure will be to South America. I'm also into restoring my 1967 Ford Mustang. It's a classic... like the one Steve McQueen drove in the film, *Bullitt*.

What dream do you intend to live out this year?

This year I'm promoting my new CD, *The Coast is Clear*. It's getting a lot of recognition and I'd like to put the effort in to promoting it. By summer I'll be hard at work on my new album and putting together some songs for a third CD. I'll be playing live on the West Coast with my band, The Nynes. That's the stuff already on the calendar. In regard to my dreams... hey, to meet up with Paul McCartney would be great.

If you could have a dinner party and invite six people, living or dead, who'd be at the table and why?

John Lennon and Paul McCartney for the obvious reasons. And Noel Gallagher, Barry Gibb, Mick Jagger and Bono. All these people changed the world by writing three-minute pop songs. That, to me, is inconceivable. Can you imagine stringing a melody together in your mind, putting the arrangement of notes on paper, recording them, and then watching the world react right before your eyes? It must be mind blowing.

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THE COAST IS CLEAR

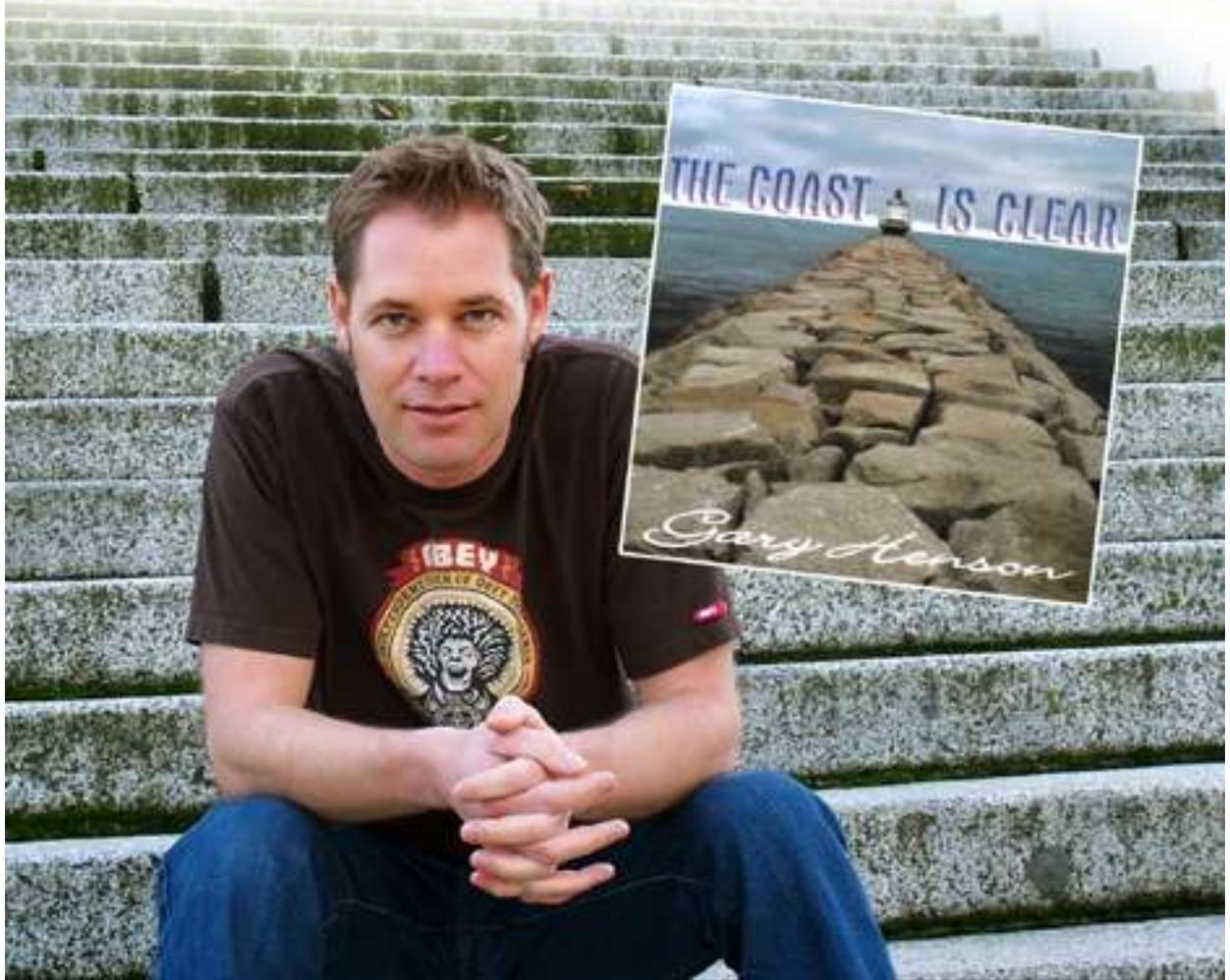


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GARY HENSON'S DEBUT CD: "THE COAST IS CLEAR"

PRODUCED BY GARY HENSON, LONNIE PEDERSEN AND GRAMMY AWARD WINNER STEVE POULIOT.

Featuring performances by: Johnathan Clark, Richard Jacobson, Phil Parlapiano, Taras Prodaniuk, David Raven, Rick Solem, Blaine Tillack, Billy Watts and Zeke Zirngiebel. Strings by Quiet Street Productions.

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