

# Big Blue World

by Brian M. Owens

Combining cleverly crafted three-part vocal harmonies with World Beat grooves that incorporate reggae, psychedelic, West African and Cuban rhythms, the quartet hailing themselves as Big Blue World have just landed a stellar new album entitled Agitate d'Love. With influences as varied as Paul Simon, Fela Kuti, Bob Marley, Peter Gabriel, Buena Vista Social Club, the Grateful Dead and Ali Farka Toure, Big Blue World offers up a whole new canvas of

**METRONOME: How do the song ideas come to you because this album has a world beat vibe to it?**

Chris Chitouras: We've been incorporating different styles in our music from the beginning. That really effects our sound.

**METRONOME: I heard Paul Simon, Bob Marley and other world music artists in your sound, yet you guys melded it all together really well. Are those guys influences?**



Chris Chitouras

Conor O'Brien

beautiful music for the masses. We caught up with the band in August and they talked about how the album came to life...

**METRONOME: How long was your new album, Agitate d'Love in the making?**

Conor O'Brien: It was in the making for a few years in the songwriting process- we spent a couple of years writing the songs, but we did the recording process very quickly.

We were in the studio for one weekend for three days where we got basic tracks down. We went back and did overdubs after that. The core of it though was recorded in a weekend.

**METRONOME: How did you guys flesh the songs out prior to going in to the studio?**

Frank Laurino: It depended on the song. Some of these came from ideas worked over time and others came from rehearsals. Others were thrown together rather quickly and some were songs from our collective past. I guess it was a combination.

Conor: One thing I've been excited about in our songwriting process is that somebody is bringing a song tid-bit in to practice and then people are throwing in different rhythmic ideas and arrangements. I like the fact that we're all contributing to that process which is something I haven't experienced in a lot of other bands.

Chris: That's the fun part of this band. We really enjoy creating music that's not just rock & roll or pop. Our songs all have different aspects like a reggae feel. People also comment how we sound like the Allman Brothers with the jam element.

Jeff Chitouras: The last song on the CD is called "Roots." That's sort of where the band comes from for a lot of the influences. You've got your Jefferson Airplane "feed your head," then you've got your Dead/Allman influence jamming thing and then it all ends with "A Love Supreme (laughs)." That's where the band is coming from and it's rather impressive to watch.

Conor: Paul Simon and Bob Marley are two people that we all love and are trained in (you could say). When Chris and I got together in 2001, our original idea was to create a trio and incorporate music from multiple cultures.

I was bringing a lot of acoustic Latin style guitar and Chris was bringing in some of the African stuff. When we got together with Keith [Kirkpatrick] and did the trio, we really worked on vocals and focused in on getting good harmonies together before we looked for a drummer. When we finally brought Frank in to the mix, we felt like we were fusing all our influences together.

**METRONOME: So you guys were conscientious about wanting to have great harmony vocals?**

Keith: Yes. We spent a lot of time just trying to get a good vocal blend. The challenge with the studio was to try and recreate that live. The vocals are one thing where we actually did overdubs. It's live in the sense that the lead vocal is live, but then we went in and judiciously created background vocals from there.

Frank: The vocals are interesting to me because I was wondering how I would fit in to a band with an emphasis on vocals and how would I deal with that? It's been an absolute joy listening to these guys sing from behind the drum kit. Especially Conor. Apart from the words that he crafts, there is a certain instrumental quality to his voice. It's almost cello like in my mind.

Then the way that Keith and Chris come in, there's an orchestral sensibility to their vocals, so it really changed my view of what a vocal presentation can be in music. From an audience stand point, it's a lot easier to get in to a song when there are engaging vocals going on. This has been transformative to me listening to these guys sing in this band.

**METRONOME: Who came up with the idea to include "White Rabbit" in the song, "Roots?"**

Jeff: They were jamming a lot and played a cover of "White Rabbit," so I did a little song arc or story arc to the whole Agitate d'Love theme that was going on. The CD really turned out to be something we hadn't expected. As I picked the songs out, there

I picked the songs accordingly and realized there was a story arc. The CD was created organically by accident.

Conor: Jeff did really have a vision. I had high expectations too, but I didn't want to stress anyone out.

**METRONOME: Did you have a good idea of how you wanted things to sound before you went in to the studio?**

Keith: We wanted to record an album, but we didn't know it would get done the way it got done. We had a general sense that we had a lot of material that included our comfort songs like "White Rabbit." We wanted covers and jams and things to go to, that weren't arranged songs.

There were a bunch of arranged songs that we put time and detail in to, but there were others where we said, Let's just play, like "White Rabbit."

**METRONOME: Were any of the songs put together in an improv fashion the day of the recording?**

Frank: "Out On Your Own" was created on the spot. And to my knowledge we had never played "A Love Supreme" before. We just threw it out and dialed back to the memory vault with the tape rolling.

Conor: I never played that song before or ever sang any of those words in my life. I had no idea if what I was singing was correct (laughs). It just came out. "Out On Your Own" is a song that I'm really proud of for us as a band, because we hadn't played a note of that song before that day.



Keith Kirkpatrick

Frank Laurino

was a lot of song material, so the "Roots" thing came organically as an epilogue to the whole experience.

**METRONOME: Jeff, were you considered the fifth member of the band in the studio?**

Jeff: The key thing we did was to come in, play and have fun. Coming out of all the songs we recorded (eighteen in three days),

It just came out of a long seventeen minute improvisational jam already to go.

We improv a lot in practice, but we have never fully completed a song during an improv before. It was pretty cool that we captured it.

Jeff: That is actually my favorite song because it fits exactly in my dream as an engineer- trying to catch an emotion

and then trying to get it on to a recorded medium. That was the band's gestalt muse coming through. Then to have Conor sing those words on the spot... I love that song. There was no thought going on. It was in the moment.

Frank: I have to say, Jeff made that whole weekend. I've never been in a session where the guy behind the board got the band more than Jeff got us. That made everything. It was three days of musical joy.

**METRONOME: Did you feel well rehearsed before you went in to the studio?**

Keith: In a rehearsal, Chris said, "Jeff would like to record us sometime." We usually like to jam at rehearsals, so I said, Let's jam, but let's jam with a little bit of songwriting in mind. We played for about ten minutes and ended up with something that hung together more. That particular jam turned in to the first song of the album, "Pictures of Pluto."

Chris: The biggest turning point for Big Blue World was writing as a band. Conor would bring in songs and I would bring in songs but "Pictures of Pluto" was one of the first where we wrote as a band. So for me, that was the biggest turning point—writing as a band and opening up our minds to arranging and the creative process and expanding the conventional songwriting norms.

**METRONOME: Keith, how often did you use the Chapman stick on the recording?**

Keith: Just on one song.

**METRONOME: Who came up with the name for the CD?**

Jeff: That was me. From beginning to end each song is in some way a reflection of our times. It's a reflection of agitated times that we find ourselves in. It felt that way to me going through the whole mixing process. I just put the name out and there it was.

Chris: We didn't go in with a concept for the album. It just organically came out and Jeff saw that arc through the whole CD and how it related to that.

Jeff: You have to remember there were eighteen songs... there are nine songs on the CD, but we recorded eighteen. Coming from my free-form radio days, it informed how I picked and chose and sequenced.

**METRONOME: Did that come after you listened back to the eighteen songs?**

Jeff: Yes. None of this was planned. It was supposed to be, Come on in and let's have some fun.

Frank: The only thing I expected walking in to this was that Jeff promised coffee and snacks. He's kind of a snack guy for the band.

Conor: It was really Jeff's vision to all be in the same room at the same time and play live. Jeff said, "We're going to make a representation of this room on to tape." He had that concept and that was one of the reasons that it made it possible to get all of

this in one weekend.

The nice part for me as a singer is I'm always in the can singing with headphones on and trying to pull the one ear off. Pitch for me is much more difficult when you're in headphones. As soon as you get out of headphones, you have such freedom as a singer. That was Jeff's vision. Then when he said to me, "Let's call it *Agitate d'Love*. Every song is about love. As the writer of the lyrics, I said, Really, let me look at the song titles. It's funny because they do all relate to love, but different types of love. One is a father and son, one is spiritual love, one is a forbidden love in the song "Khamsin," one is about a person who is enamored with a band in a fake type of love and "Cycles" is about the love of a planet, so it is all about love, but not romantic type love.

Jeff: Which is why I loved it. It was rich. It wasn't boring.

**METRONOME: Have you had a CD release party for *Agitate d'Love*?**

Keith: We had an unofficial pre-release concert at the Amazing Things Art Center in Framingham. Every show since then, we've called it a CD release, because we have CDs (laughs).

**METRONOME: When you guys play this material live, what is some of the feedback you've been receiving from your audiences?**

Keith: That was great. Can I buy you a beer?

Conor: During our last show at the Stone Church, we were opening for Truffle. When we got off stage Dave Bailey, the bass player for Truffle really went to town and said a lot about this album. He felt it was the most cohesive album I have ever put out and that you could really hear this was one band playing these songs together in a very live and energetic way. He thought it was really infectious and pushed you to listen to it as a whole.

Frank: The feedback that is most appreciated by me while we're playing is when I look out and see people dancing. That's like, wow. That speaks to me immediately.

Jeff: The people are dancing to songs they don't know. They're not hearing it on the radio. It's the groove that's making them move and that's what is so satisfying.

**METRONOME: Do you have any shows planned this Fall?**

Chris: We just booked the Castle On The Charles in Rochester, N.H. It's a medieval castle set up for music with food, beer and wine. We have a gig there on Friday, October 19. We also have a show at The Common Ground in Arlington on Thursday, October 25th.

Conor: We're also doing some shows at the Spaulding Rehabilitation Center in Cambridge. We volunteer there every couple of months and play shows for the folks that are going through rehabilitation there.



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