

The COCONUT TELEGRAPH

MARGARITAVILLE CHRISTMAS 1990

VOLUME 6, NO. 5

The following interview took place in Coconut Grove prior to the filming of the "Live By The Bay" video. The video was recorded at Miami Marine Stadium, and relevant segments of the interview were edited into the concert video. This proved to be a very effective means of showcasing a live Buffett performance, while at the same time allowing Jimmy to detail "how the whole thing got started." Those familiar with "Live By The Bay" may recognize bits and pieces of the interview, however, the majority ended up in *The COCONUT TELEGRAPH*.



THE MAIN REASON FOR GETTING INTO MUSIC WAS TO MEET GIRLS, NO DOUBT ABOUT IT.

I always loved music, all the way to joining the Columbia Record Club and sending the records to the wrong address so I wouldn't have to pay for them. I ordered every Kingston Trio album through the club and never paid for them. I always loved listening to music from New Orleans radio stations. At this time it was the middle of the folk era, and there were many clubs up and down the Mississippi gulf coast.

I got into music basically to meet girls, no doubt about it. Women have always been an influence on my music, good and bad. It looked like the greatest job in the world. I was in college at the time, a freshman at Auburn University. I was a shy, awkward kid from Mobile, kind of a wallflower. My roommate had a guitar and even though he knew only 3 chords, always seemed to be the center of attention with the women. I said, "Teach me those chords."

I THOUGHT, THIS IS THE JOB FOR ME.

So I learned the guitar, and starting hanging around folk clubs, watching the bands. They all had big, shiny Martin guitars; I would've given my right arm for a Martin guitar. And the women, all the time women hanging around the band. I thought, this is the job for me.

I was always a lover of the lyrical song, and I think the people that influenced me in those days sort of typified my upbringing. I grew up in Mobile, AL. My relatives on my grandmothers' side were kind of Cajun, Indian, wild people from that area. My grandfather was a sailing ship captain who migrated from Nova Scotia. So it was like a gumbo kind of musical experience. I'd listen to the radio from New Orleans; Benny Spellman, Irma Thomas, and heavy old great black New Orleans artists, which is really contrary to what people think. They assume if you come from Alabama, you listen to country music. I really didn't like it much, all my early influence was out of New Orleans.

When I first started playing it was in folk clubs, and I had all this great gulf coast, New Orleans, black input that I drew on playing folk music. At that time I was listening to

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people like Gordon Lightfoot and Joni Mitchell, who were great writers above everything else. What I wanted to try to do was to write clever, good songs like those people.

I was in Nashville in 1971. I'd been turned down by 26 record labels and couldn't get songs published. I had

THE FLORIDA EXPERIENCE

wrecked by ex-wife's car, and I had no alternative, I thought, but to look toward warmer climates. So I took an expired Diners Club card, held my thumb over the expiration date, went to the TWA counter and bought a ticket to Miami. I was supposed to have a job at a little

coffee house called the Flip, the "in place" for folkies in south Florida at that time. At anyrate, I got there, and of course, there was no job. I was in Florida, no job, and I was broke. Fortunately my old friend Jerry Jeff Walker had a house bere and took me in. So I lived in Coconut Grove for about 6 months and worked the folk circuit. I had always wanted to go to Key West. Watching Edward G. Robinson and Humphrey Bogart in KEY LARGO was the catalyst that sent me farther south. So we got into Jerry Jeff's '47 Packard and took the old overseas highway to Key West. We got there sometime in November, temperature about 85 degrees, there





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was a sailboat race going on, I found a bar, and the rest is history.

Strangely enough when I first got to Key West there wasn't a real musical scene. It was much more of a literary presence, which was good because I had been a book reader for a long time; a great fan of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner. So that literary side attracted me because I loved reading and felt comfortable in that atmosphere.

I was basically one of the few performers. I started working in a place called Howies Lounge on Duval street. I worked the cocktail hour behind the piano bar. It's a dive shop now, but in those days it was a God-fearing establishment. I thought that if God was going to end the world, he would start with Howies Lounge. I liked Key West because I was the only "fish in the pond" from a musical standpoint. Things changed a

When California Angels coach Moose Stabing sighted a plane flying overhead with a streamer advertising an upcoming Jimmy Buffett concert, he turned to manager Doug Rader and said, "What's so good about Jimmy's Buffett?"

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little later, but that's the way it was.

The first hit was COME MONDAY off an album called "Livin' & Dyin' in 3/4 Time". Everyone asked me why there was no reference in any of the songs to 3/4 Time. I was still working on a song called NAUTICAL WHEELERS at that time. I said I knew that there were no songs titled LIVIN' & DYIN', but I liked the line and decided to use it as title for the album. That's when the people at the record company knew I was crazy and probably uncontrollable, it only took them about 20 years to give me my head.

I was in Europe on a film documentary, shopping in a department store in London, when I heard COME

MONDAY over the loudspeaker. I thought I'd better call home and see what was happening, and by that time it was like #10. I had to stay there [Europe] for 3 months, and yet everything had taken off and I wasn't even here.

I came back and met with a great guy, Corb Donahue, who used to work for the record company. He said, "Things are going real well here, you should consider going on the road, but I don't know if you could handle it knowing your lifestyle. You must recognize what this involves." I didn't think even for a minute of not going for it. A lot of frustrated artists are people who didn't take the opportunity when it was presented. There's a very small aperture



Photo: Eric Hasenko

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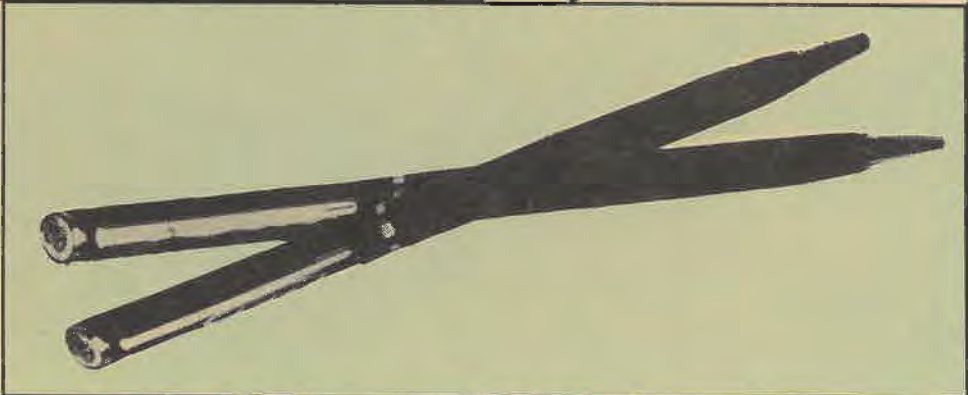


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Early days on the road.

of success, and when it opens your time is there. You'd better jump through or you'll regret it the rest of your life. Next thing I knew, I'd gone from the idyllic lifestyle of a beach bum to spending 300 days a year on the road.

I always hoped that success wouldn't spoil my lifestyle, I really did. I made a real conscious effort to make sure that didn't happen. I was pretty much established, I thought, the way I wanted to live. I didn't want to move to Hollywood or New York. I hoped that I could make my music and live where I was comfortable when I wasn't on the road. So far that's worked out.

The first time I made a lot of money I made them cut 2 checks. I gave one to

the accountants, and spent the other on a boat. When I started this whole thing out I thought that if I could just make enough money to buy a boat and find a bar to play in, I would be happy. And I still believe that, you have to have that bail out plan all the time.

So that's what I did. After all the years of looking at the beautiful boats at the boat shows, I could really do it. I eventually bought one from a Miami boat show, but didn't know what to call it. My friend Tom Corcoran was with me taking pictures. Anyway I had this t-shirt on from a place called The Euphoria Bar, and that, coupled with the look on my face, gave us the name, EUPHORIA.



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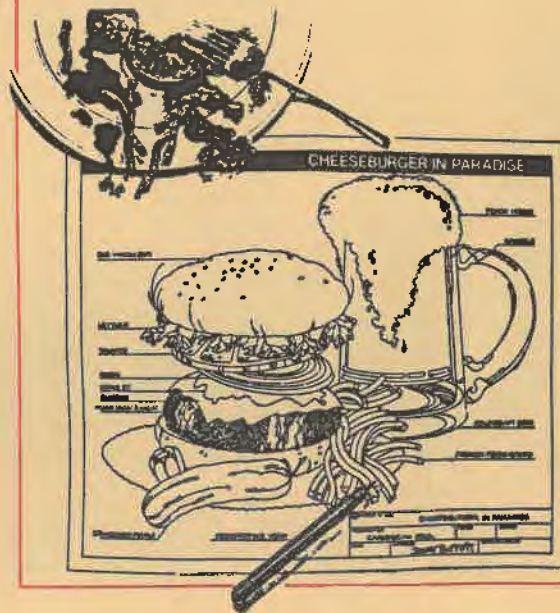
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STORIES BEHIND THE SONGS

Come Monday

I guess most writers and musicians use women as sources for their material. Through everything women have been real important to me; there've been real good ones and real bad ones, this one happened to be a good one. I was in San Francisco at the time playing at the Lion's Share, doing an acoustic set, playing by myself. I was the opening act for **Country Joe & The Fish**. This was in Marin County, and people were dancing to my acoustic set; only place that ever happened. I knew then that something was weird in Marin county. So I was staying in this Howard Johnsons, and I had to get out. The lady with me at the time had left claiming she "needed some space." I wasn't as broke up about her leaving as I was about having to stay in that Howard Johnsons. So that was the idea for **Come Monday**, the real basis for the story. She had left, and it was the Labor Day weekend, and come Monday I would be with her in Colorado.

For some reason I tend to use days of the week in some of my heavier love songs. The first hit was **Come Monday**, and an earlier song I had written called **Abandoned on Tuesday**, which was just an awful song. Days of the week portend bad things for me.

Son Of A Son Of A Sailor

Came to me as a real expression of my family lineage. My grandfather was a sailing ship captain from Nova Scotia, my father was, or still is rather, a shipbuilder. Whatever was going to happen with me and my career, I knew I'd always be near the water. I've always used the ocean as an escape valve, it's the one place where I can go to get away from everything. I'm sure in my grandfather's eyes I should be doing it from the bridge of a ship instead of on stage, but it all works out just the same.

Grapefruit Juicyfruit

When I first discovered Key West it was on a grand scale; like to the tune of 24 hours a day for about 5 weeks. After all the disappointment in Nashville, here I was on a tropical island having as much fun as I could. Life was good.

I'm sure by now everyone is pretty familiar with the **Islander Drive-In** story. Suffice it to say that after a night of shedding old Catholic guilt in a vat of purple passion, a stick of juicyfruit came in real handy in the morning.

Volcano

We did that album in Montserrat, and I took the Coral Reefers on what turned out to be an expedition. Indiana Jones had nothing on us. We went to a Caribbean island with a state of the art recording studio. We were the first American band to record in Montserrat which has now become a very heavy recording facility. [Hurricane Hugo leveled Montserrat in November, 1989] It didn't take long to realize that we had started out on the wrong foot. We chartered a DC3 to carry our gear out of Ft. Lauderdale. Now in south Florida, in those days, [late 70's] there was much more contraband in DC3's than band gear. An old roadie of mine, Max Crabtree, had the unenviable task of riding with the gear to Montserrat. So Max gets pretty well cranked up on vodka for the long ride to Montserrat. The plane had to land in Miami for fuel, and the DEA thought it was a drug plane and they swarmed all over poor Max. They got the wrong plane, so somebody got in that night.

Changes In Latitude

When the idea came to me, it just said it all. To play rock & roll on stage and go through the day to day grind of touring, the only thing on my mind is to get it over with and get out on the boat. Then after a couple of weeks at sea, in a storm with 20 ft. seas, and I could be sitting in a hotel ordering room service. **Changes** to me is the key to keeping an even balance.

Why Don't We Get Drunk

This song was written with a bit of vindictiveness on my part, I must admit. I thought I was a pretty damn good songwriter in those days, and I was having a hard time getting anyone to listen to or record any of my songs. Most traditional country songs were very suggestive although very conventional, and I thought I'd write one that left nothing to question.

So we're in a Marriott hotel in Atlanta, having a very early breakfast watching some businessman in a powder blue

polyester suit trying his best to approach this hooker, who was obviously tired from a long night's work. I'm sure what he heard himself saying made complete sense, however, nothing but drunken slurring was coming out. And the rest is history.

I'm told that that song is one of the most requested jukebox records. If I earned royalties off jukeboxes I could've retired years ago. Women listen to that song a lot more than men do.

Cheeseburger In Paradise

The more time you spend at sea, the more time is spent on thinking about things you really want. A good cheeseburger is one of those things. We were on a trip down island, and were approaching Tortola in the British West Indies. All the while we were conjuring the vision of the perfect cheeseburger. So we docked at this little marina at Village Key in Tortola, found the first cheeseburger we could--and it was the worst cheeseburger in the world. I think it was horsemeat, but it didn't matter at the time.

Fortunately, the quality of cheeseburgers in the Caribbean has improved.

Fins

Pretty obvious, sharks that swim on the land. There are bars by every beach, and they foster a special species-landsharks.

Pirate Looks At Forty

Of all the songs I have written this one is probably my favorite. I didn't write it about me, it was not intended to be autobiographical. In fact I never thought I'd make it to 40. It was written with a lot of admiration and nostalgia for anyone who tends to think of themselves as a romantic. I enjoyed reading **Treasure Island** or watching Errol Flynn in **Sea Hawk**, and when I met my first real life pirate I figured they were worth a song.

Margaritaville

Believe it or not, I actually wrote the song in about 5 minutes. Of course I had done about 10 years of research. **Margaritaville** is not about Key West, or any place else. It's a state of mind. I wrote it in a bar in Texas after returning from a trip to Cozumel, but it does have a feeling for the old days in Key West. I have a dream of an island, it doesn't

exist, but I'm on a beach without a problem in the world. That's what Margaritaville is all about.

Boat Drinks

Hockey, I'm not really a hockey fan, because it's not a warm weather sport. However, if you're in a bar in Boston and the Bruins are playing, you'd better damn well be a hockey fan. That particular night I had been grossly over served at the bar. I couldn't find a way home, and there was a taxi cab sitting there running, so I took it back to the hotel. I was later reprimanded, but everything worked out.

The next day in the paper I saw a "getaway" ad, the ones they always run up north in the winter of flying to saint somewhere. So I knew that if I could just get to place with a Saint in it, I'd be okay.

MORE REMINISCING IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE COCONUT TELEGRAPH.



Photo: Eric Ilasenko

"20 DEGREES AND THE HOCKEY GAME'S ON"

COCONUT TELEGRAPH

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THE COCONUT TELEGRAPH

THE MARGARITAVILLE STORE

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