



## CHAPTER 17

### *Thinking Big...and then there were ten.*

A gig at The Buffalo Bar, Highbury Corner, London followed on November 17th. Another (very) mini ambition crossed off. The Buffalo Bar had become a bit of a second home for me. I had been going there practically every week for years to the Artrocker club (pretty much since the club started in fact). I absolutely loved that venue. It had a great sound and atmosphere, along with the best sound guy around IMHO. It wasn't for Artrocker we played though. They'd sadly stopped doing gigs. Well they *had* stopped the weekly nights there anyway.

Next up was a gig for a new club "Last of the Great Records" on December 1st, where James Spiller filmed us playing "Searching for a New World" and created a great video that worked as a promo for the club and a promo for us too.

We played one more gig for 2009, once again at The Legion for Spoon on December 10<sup>th</sup>, before concentrating on another Clinker project we'd agreed to do a while back.

At one of our gigs at The Legion, as far back as August I believe, we were asked by Ilia Rogachevski (aka Elijah Van DeWilde) and Mandi Taylor, both members of duo Sebastian Melmoth, to take part in a gig at The Photographers Gallery, London that they were arranging. We were asked to go and see an exhibition showing, Jim Goldberg' "Open See", and write and perform a set of tunes inspired by what we saw/felt for what would be the "Open Listen" gig. Sounded very interesting to us, so we agreed. The important thing we had to take into consideration was that we couldn't play loud. It had to be acoustic or at least something pretty quiet. I originally thought maybe we could do something in the ambient electronic vein.



I'm not sure when the exhibition opened, but we eventually saw it on November 27<sup>th</sup> and immediately got to work writing some new tunes inspired by it. Tomoko and I had taken handbooks to make notes and were quite emotionally moved by what we saw. The photographs were taken in war torn areas around the world depicting the suffering people go through trying to escape the hell they were living in, sometimes only to end up in another quite different kind of hell somewhere else. That's what I took from it anyway. Some of the photos were written on by the people being photographed. Sometimes of the hell they'd experienced or the hopes they had of escaping. With all thought of an ambient electronic set forgotten we went down the route of an acoustic set of songs, with extra backing singers and musicians.

Totally inspired, the first song "Border" was written on the very day we saw the exhibition.

With the gig set for January 16<sup>th</sup> 2010, we got stuck into writing and arranging the tunes and after our last gig of 2009 at The Legion really got 100% focused on the project. The songs pretty much wrote themselves. Using notes from the exhibition, a lot of what I wrote was taken from quotes scribbled down by either Tomoko or I when we went to see the exhibition. I just expanded on them...and without trying to sound too pretentious...tried to get inside their minds a bit to feel what they were saying.

Finding the extra musicians and singers was quite an easy task actually (after a few frustrating initial starts). Ichiko was the key. She was acquainted with a number of Japanese girls involved with making music. None of them had played a gig before but were happy to be involved with the project. Also, she knew a blues singer Maggie Brown who fancied joining in. In the end, we had a ten piece band to play the gig. Additional flute (Hazuki Granska) and cello (Yumi Takada), Antonio on violin and sax, Ichiko on piano and backing vocals, Tomoko on glockenspiel, shaker and backing



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vocals, me on acoustic guitar and vocals, plus four additional backing vocalists (Maggie Brown, Naomi Doi, Yukiko Hayashi and Nami Nagata).

As we were writing, we were also recording the tunes, with the plan to give the songs away as an “Open See” EP on CD at the gig (and as a FREE download afterwards of course). We worked solidly writing, recording and rehearsing the tunes right up to the day of the gig. In fact, the last song “Will This Never End” was only written the week before. That’s pressure!

I think the whole experience brought the four of us closer and tighter as a band. As far as arranging the rehearsals, I could pretty much take a back seat. Most of the arrangements were done by Antonio and Ichiko, Antonio scoring the classical instruments and Ichiko working with the backing singers. Of course Tomoko did a lot of the strings and stuff on the recordings, but the live thing was where Ichiko and Antonio really showed their worth with this gig and as part of Clinker.

We knew we’d only be doing this as a one off concert and really wanted to get it filmed. Initially we asked Ambrose to do it, but he let us down three days before the gig. James Spiller said he couldn’t do it, so we eventually got Dominic Jacobs on board. Dominic was the son of Tomoko’s day job boss and we knew he had a fantastic camera.

The gig day came and we were surprised how many people were there to watch it (as were the organisers Ilia and Mandi. I guess they weren’t the only organisers, but *they* were the ones who asked us). We weren’t the only performers on the day, but we were last to go on. I’m glad we filmed it, because it was great fun and...well we thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience. Everyone played well, we gave away a lot of “Open See” CDs and all went home with smiles on our faces.



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In some ways though, it was good that it was over and we could move on. “From now on”, I said afterwards, “acoustic guitars are banned”.



1. Greece
2. One Hell to Another
3. Border
4. Will This Never End (Ood Song)