

Q & A

with Gunnar Madsen

How did The Bobs form? Bass singer Richard Greene answered my ad in the paper for an a cappella group. At first we experimented with traditional music forms, like doo wop. But I loved “Psycho Killer” and Richard loved Elvis Costello. It wasn’t a question of ‘we’re going to be cutting edge’, it was more a question of ‘Do you really want to do “The Lion Sleeps Tonight”?’ No, we did not.

What do you think is the secret of The Bobs success? It’s a real high wire act. People are still amazed that you can make such rich and complex music with just the human voice.

Why did you leave the Bobs in 1991? The Bobs format had grown stale for me, and, after 10 years, I was yearning to do something else artistically besides a cappella.

What were you doing from 1991 until 1997 when Spinning World was recorded? Oh, lots of projects. I studied method acting. I wrote a film score. I collaborated on a number of scores for dance and theater. I wrote a short opera, “Requiem for a Butt-head.” I wrote music and designed sound for the Atari video game “San Francisco Rush.” And I was writing songs and music for myself - many of which would end up on Spinning world and Power of a Hat.

After The Bobs, I needed to find my own direction musically and personally. I had to find my own voice. I’ve found it now! That journey also took me in unexpected and exciting directions – a role I took with the South Coast Repertory led me to LA, where I then landed a job singing the vocals of Sammy Davis Jr. for “The Rat Pack” for HBO.

After 6 albums of a cappella voices, what made you think of writing/composing an instrumental album? It was so great NOT to write for voices. When friends with a booming Ballroom Dance video/music company commissioned me to write the waltzes, it was like a breath of fresh air after 10 years of writing music without instrumentation.

Which composers influenced Spinning World? One waltz was inspired by Erik Satie (“Far and Away”). Another waltz echoes the sound of Aaron Copeland (“Five Lakes”). “Hans is Happy”, has a mid-19th century German romantic feel - midway between Schubert and Schumann. The structure of “The Old Vienna” definitely draws on Johann Strauss.

Why did you decide to launch your own record company, G Spot Records? In The Bobs, we spent years waiting for a major label “discover us.” In retrospect, it was

a bad way to spend our energy. So when I recorded SW and POAH, I just decided to release them myself. I may not sell as many CD’s doing it this way, but at least I get my music out in the world which is the most important thing.



How would you describe the music on Power of a Hat? My favorite albums are those that have an arc, that take you on from beginning to end. The Power of a Hat is written to do just that. It starts off sunny, travels to dark places, but by the end you feel fulfilled. The songs all stand on their own, but the album’s power comes when you sit down and listen to the album as if it was a novel.

Did Power of a Hat raise a few eyebrows after Spinning World? In my heart of hearts I love pop music, but I love *all* music. For me, it was not a huge crazy leap from POAH to SW. In terms of radio marketing, I was hitting two different markets. The classical stations were not going to play POAH, and rock stations were not going to play SW. Some of the college and public stations loved both, and my fans have been incredibly open minded and supportive of my music in all of its forms.

What inspired a children’s album? I am passionate about creating music for children that treats them with respect, that both meets them at their level and challenges them to stretch their hearts and minds. My works with the Bobs had always been popular with children. In 1985, Richard “Bob” Greene and I joined 3 other songwriters to write and create songs for children. The group broke up, but ever since then I have written songs and stories for children. It was great to revive some of those old songs, which I love, and include them on this new album.

What’s next for Gunnar Madsen? After the flurry of recording and getting my record company off the ground, I’m looking forward to more live performing. Schools are contacting me about performing assemblies for youngsters in K-6. I have all kinds of ideas for children’s videos of Old Mr. Mackle Hackle’s songs. I’m looking for a new publisher for my children’s stories.

I’m very excited about recording a follow-up to The Power of a Hat. This time I would really like to work with samplers and loops - to really have some fun with today’s technology. I am also working on more waltzes and instrumental pieces.

My children’s screenplay is currently being shopped around by Open Door Entertainment. I envision hosting a television program that picks up where Leonard Bernstein’s “Music for Young People” left off. And I’ve recently completed a television series based on the character of Old Mr. Mackle Hackle, set in New York City. It’s a hoot!