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Thirteen

by Michelle Dockrey & Tony Fabris

About the Song

Vixy:

This is a song about my lucky number. Actually it's a song about magpies, and about what happens when you see thirteen of them. And it's about my lucky number.

About the Songwriting

Vixy:

"Thirteen" is the only song that I've ever written — from my point of view, anyway — *backwards*.

I was listening to the radio one day and was completely stopped in my tracks by the song "Black Horse and the Cherry Tree" by KT Tunstall. My God, I thought, I have *got* to write a song like that. I went home and told Tony I desperately wanted to write a song in this style. Now, Tony's magic. I can say to him, "I'd really like to sing a cover of this," and I give him about thirty minutes and he's learned it. So saying to him, "I'd really like to do something in this style" was a snap; he heard it once, and in no time he had a fantastic riff going — reminiscent of the style, but still different enough to be unique — and we were off and running.

Now I had to figure out what the song could be about. What did the style suggest to me? Somehow it seemed like a good counting song. What do people count, anyway? Then I remembered the various counting rhymes for seeing magpies or crows — one's for sorrow, two's for joy, etc. However many you see, that predicts something that's going to happen. (Look them up on wikipedia — that's what I did.) Of all the versions I could find, all of them only went up to seven. That stuck in my mind. What if you saw more than seven of them? What would it mean?

That gave me a first verse — seeing magpies — and a second verse — making up my own meanings for eight through thirteen magpies. (That part was fun.) I wanted a third verse, a conclusion. I was stuck. What did I know about magpies? Internet research didn't give me much else that felt songworthy. Where else had I seen magpies? Well... when I was getting my teaching degree, I read *You Can't Say You Can't Play*, by Vivien Paley. (And everything else she'd written. I wanted to be her when I grew up.) The book is about Paley's kindergarten class and about her creation of a new class rule, and how it affects her own thinking, the students, and eventually the rest of her school. One day Paley happens to see a magpie and it captures her attention; for the rest of the book, one of her ways of working out her own thoughts and eventually class discussions as well is with her "magpie stories"; stories about a lonely princess in a castle, befriended by a magpie who breaks a magic spell.

So I had stories, playing, a castle, a magic magpie... I think that's what gave me the idea of transformation. The song essentially implies that if you see thirteen magpies, you turn into one.

I wonder whether it's the only folk song that's also secretly a tribute to a kindergarten teacher.

Tony:

Although KT Tunstall's song was a stylistic inspiration, I tried very hard during the songwriting and production of "Thirteen" to make sure that it was merely an acorn rather than a template. We weren't trying to copy KT's song, we just wanted something fun and bouncy, with that fun beat, that 50's style, a wild, buzzy acoustic guitar (I immediately tuned my E string down to a D, so I could get that nice buzzy [drop-D tuning](#)), and a super-catchy chorus with simple words that you could sing along with.

"That fun beat", and the entire style that followed it, [began with Bo Diddley](#), but I didn't actually know that at first. I knew the style had been around for many decades, but didn't know its exact origin point, I only

had a vague idea that it came from 1950s artists such as Elvis Presley. I knew that besides "Cherry Tree", there were a lot of other modern tributes to the same style and beat. For example, I remember playing George Michael's "Faith" in a cover-tunes band in the late 80's, knowing full well that the style and the beat were a 1950's homage. As we wrote "Thirteen", I even remember thinking of "Faith" specifically, remarking that "Cherry Tree" resembled it, too.

It wasn't until Chris Clark (our bassist for "Thirteen") came into the studio that I learned its original heritage. He had written "Bo Diddley" onto the top of the chord chart I gave him, and told me where it had all come from. Chris is probably old enough to remember when it first hit the radio! I know that for some people, this is the equivalent of me saying, "You mean Paul McCartney was in a band before Wings?", but you have to give me a bit of a break, since my musical education didn't really start until the early 80's.

It turns out that our song, KT's song, George Michael's song, and many songs before them, are all part of [a long and grand tradition](#), tracing its roots all the way back to that original Bo Diddley beat, and perhaps even farther back to [Hambone](#) before that. In an [interview I found](#) via a Google search, KT Tunstall acknowledges it directly: *"We took a lot of inspiration from these old blues guys — Bo Diddley and that kind of thing."*

The more I worked with the song in the studio, the more I kept hearing in my head a specific set of hand claps that went with that Bo Diddley beat. We put them in (after some protesting from Vixy), and I found out later that the hand claps were stuck in my head entirely because of [Willie and the Hand Jive](#) by Johnny Otis, yet another milestone in that long tradition. Listening more closely, I think that many of the modern tributes to that style (including our song and the other modern songs that inspired it) probably derive more directly from "Willie and the Hand Jive" than coming directly from Bo Diddley's original work.

The verses of "Thirteen" hang out on the one chord outlined by the main riff, basically Just a D major. Wikipedia informs me that Bo Diddley was known for doing just that, riffing entirely on one chord without changing, whereas songs like "Cherry Tree" and "Hand Jive" modulate between at least two chords. I hadn't realized I was sticking so closely to Bo Diddley's formula.

The verses that Vixy wrote have the guitar playing where the lyrics aren't singing, and vice-versa. So I had very little to do with the songwriting portion of the verses other than to play a riff between the lines. The chorus, on the other hand, was an organic thing that we wrote together, with me improvising chords and Vixy trying different melodies to go with the chords, hacking away at it a bar at a time until we had something we liked.

Footnote: As Vixy and I were preparing this entry for our Behind the Music pages, the world lost Bo Diddley. So many modern musicians were influenced by his life's work, I would even go so far as to say that all modern rock and roll has been touched by his hand. As you can see in what I wrote above, his influence was strong enough to be felt even through successive iterations, tributes based on tributes based on tributes. Many of us didn't even realize where the influence originally came from.

About the Recording

Vixy:

This is one of four songs for which we did scratch guitar and vocals and sent to the fabulous Scott Irwin to record drums by the fabulous Kristoph Klover at Flowinglass. We later realized that the song was a bit too low for me, and after Tony became okay with the idea of capo-ing a guitar that was tuned with a drop-D (there was a bit of an adjustment period there), we started performing this song at capo 2.

Just before Christmas, we realized we'd have Seanan visiting us, and we could take advantage (heh) by throwing her into the studio to record some of the backing vocals that she usually does live. But the scratch tracks were in the old key; we hadn't re-recorded them yet. Tony recorded a guitar track at the right capo, and then I hastily recorded another scratch track, so that Seanan's vocals could be in the right key. We tossed her in the basement to sing her part as best she could with literally NO notice at all, and figured we could come back to it later if needed.

Just after Seanan's Christmas visit, we all went to California again, Seanan to go home and Tony and I to spend a few days recording at Mystic Fig — me doing some vocals for the Bohnhoffs, Maya doing some vocals for me, and Maya and Tony and I all doing some vocals for Seanan. (What a musically incestuous bunch we are.) Maya, who would probably have killed me had I not let her do some vocals of her own on "Thirteen", sang some amazing harmonies that meshed wonderfully with Seanan's playful vocals. We rang in the new year with song and then Tony and I came home, as I thought, to record a final vocal and put on the finishing touches.

Only the more I listened to the scratch vocal, the more I liked the energy of it. Plus, Tony had kept in the "woo!" from the original capo-0 scratch track (I'd gotten a little excited that the take had gone well, and he thought it was cute. This is one of the many reasons you want a producer. These things never occur to me.) This is one of two songs on our album where the final vocal you hear is actually a scratch track that just went really well — only on this one it was a deliberate choice. :)

Tony:

We wrote the song and recorded the original scratch tracks in a [drop-D tuning](#). As Vixy says, we later brought that up to capo 2 so that she didn't have to dip her voice down as far in some spots of the song. Then later, at an OVFF, I went to a [DADGAD](#) workshop by [Michael "Moonwulf" Longcor](#), and decided to try doing "Thirteen" in DADGAD. I even performed the song for Michael that same evening in DADGAD, as the filk circle in the hall was starting to assemble.

The final guitar track on the recording is done in DADGAD with capo 2, but I've gone back to performing it live in drop-D tuning with capo 2. I changed back partly because it's easier to retune only the one string, but also because I noticed a distinct reduction in the energy of the song the few times I performed it live in DADGAD. I listened back to some raw tracks that John Seghers recorded of our gigs at Wayward Coffee House, and the difference between the drop-D performance and the DADGAD performance was like night and day. I don't think it's a specific fault of the DADGAD tuning, though. My guess is that I'm less familiar with the chord forms in the DADGAD tuning, and therefore spend too much energy concentrating on getting the chords right, rather than just having fun with the song and letting it flow.

I'm particularly fond of Chris Clark's upright acoustic bass on this song. It's got just the right sound and feel to fit that 50's vibe. I'd originally brought Chris in specifically because I knew he would sound good on "Erased", but he took to this song, too, like a duck to water. There's some really subtle but interesting stuff going on in the bass part that perhaps only I would notice, but which really pleases my ear: On the main verse riff, he doesn't match my guitar riff exactly, he hangs out on one note in a certain spot where my guitar is doing an ascending scale. This makes for an interesting subtle harmony between the guitar and bass that I just love. And in the later choruses, there's this descending passing tone he does (you can hear it clearly at around 03:40 on the time index counter) that would never have occurred to me if I were writing the bass part, but which fits just perfectly and gives the song some additional harmonic structure that it wouldn't otherwise have had.

Emerald Green

by Michelle Dockrey & Tony Fabris

About the Song

Vixy:

I was born in Seattle and I grew up in the Pacific Northwest. I'd always wanted to write a song that expressed my deep love for this place. The Northwest has everything: a beautiful city stretching from the hills to the water, national parks and woodlands, tons of lakes and rivers, two mountain ranges, the Pacific Ocean and Puget Sound, islands, rainforests, a major international port, a literal (and historic) underground city, and an active volcano. All within day-trip distance.

But most of all... it's green. Green green green. So much water and so much green. When I had to move away for a while, a friend, predicting I'd be back, remarked to me, "this place just *says... life.*" And that summed it up for me. Nowhere else that I've ever visited says "life" quite as thoroughly as the Pacific Northwest.

No matter where I've traveled, I always knew I was coming home when I looked out the window and saw a skyline shaped of nothing but the jagged lines of evergreen trees.

About the Songwriting

Vixy:

Sometimes the best songs are the hardest. This one took years to write. There was *so much imagery* that I wanted to cram into such a small space; it needed not to be forever long, but it also needed to carry the feeling I wanted to get across. It was years of just scattered phrases written down and discarded and started over, and even after it finally had some structure, it went through several incarnations before the final one.

One early incarnation had a verse about my years in southern California; how I had to move there (you don't have a choice when you're a kid) and how there was too much brown and not enough green. But it just wasn't working; as cute as it might be to say "oh there's a color missing", it just wasn't right to have a song about how much you love your home, and include a verse essentially dissing someone else's. I was getting off track; this wasn't what I had intended to say.

The second major incarnation was all images and nothing else. This one was actually completed, and I think I even sang it in a filk circle somewhere, though I don't remember where. I'd been trying to pack it full of childhood images: my sister and I playing "don't touch the sand" on the beaches at Whidbey Island, seeing how far we could run hopping along the driftwood logs; climbing trees in the woods near my grade school; spending hours curled in a comfy velvet armchair in my living room, watching storms whip the branches of the evergreens in the backyards; sitting at that same window watching snow cover everything... it went on and on. I tried to arrange it by chronology, and sort of have all four seasons in each verse.

Trouble was, it was so completely jam-packed with imagery that there was no room for emotion, even in the chorus. It was like looking at a slide show. It didn't go over well where I sang it, and even I thought it was boring and stilted. I was getting incredibly frustrated and just about ready to give up on the whole idea.

It was on the way to a house filk that I finally decided to chuck nearly the whole song and start over. I knew I'd have to let go of a lot of the images; however badly I wanted to show everyone my entire photo album, the photos just weren't the point. The first thing was to simplify the chorus; there's still imagery there, but it's in much plainer language than it was. Then I had to pick just a few photos for the verses, and describe them, again, in much less flowery language than before.

It's funny; keeping it simple gave it a chance to let the emotion come through. I think its main problem before was that it had been so choked with all the prettiest words I could find that it wasn't *me*. I was trying to

say so much that it wound up not saying what I meant; when I stopped trying so hard to say *everything*, that was when the song finally started to say the *important* things.

Tony:

Normally, our collaborative songwriting process involves Vixy having most of the lyrics written first, and a fairly strong idea about the melody. Then we sit together and I work out chords to fit the melody. Sometimes it will be sort of a push-pull thing, where my chord progression will dictate a new direction for the melody, but usually Vix comes to me with the song mostly done. That was the case with this song, except for the bridge. Vixy hadn't written any melody for a bridge, and I seem to recall the lyrics for the bridge weren't even finished at that point. We had the melody and chords for the chorus and verses completed for her first iteration of the song, enough to perform it once in a filk circle, a Baycon I believe it was. But that early version didn't have the bridge yet, if I'm recalling correctly.

I ended up creating a bridge from whole cloth, improvising an electric guitar melody over some minor chords that resolved back into the major chords of the chorus. That seems to be my default method of making bridges for Vixy's songs: Just go minor! It's a cheap trick, but it works really well. Vixy then took that melody and modified it into something she could sing and something that made more musical sense to her. Later, she tailored lyrics to fit the melody, and we had a song.

This turns out to be the way things happen for many of the songs we write together; Vixy's got the verses and choruses mostly solid on her own, and I end up doing most of the middle bit. This has happened often enough that Vix has now taken to calling me her "civil engineer" (because I make all her bridges for her, you see).

The guitar arpeggios on the bridge, the bit during the lyrics before the guitar solo, weren't originally intended to be in the song. But as I was putting the pieces together and mixing the song, I realized that the bridge needed to be stylistically distinct from the rest of the song, just "going minor" wasn't enough. So on a whim, I sat down in the bedroom, played my current mix of the song, and started picking away at odd chord inversions on the guitar until I came up with something I liked. I was deliberately trying to do chords high up on the neck on the three highest strings, drawing my inspiration from David Gilmour pieces like "Us and Them". I seem to recall that I recorded it right away, either that very night or the following day, then promptly forgot what I'd done. I don't think I could reproduce it now without completely reverse-engineering it all over again.

About the Recording

Tony:

Every aspect of this song was fun to record, although I have to say, I wasn't present for part of it. The drums were done sight-unseen, by Scott Irwin in Kristoph's studio in Oakland. We were very pleased with what he did, he captured the feel I was looking for, and Kristoph's engineering meant that his performance was captured flawlessly.

The basic rhythm guitar parts worked in with the drums quite well and gave us something solid for adding ornamentation. I was particularly happy with the way the bridge section swells dramatically into the guitar solo over the chorus chords. To emphasize the bridge guitar even more, I added a [leslie](#) simulator to give it that characteristic swirl.

The solo itself was originally intended to be a soaring, [legato](#) electric guitar. But each time I actually sat down to record a solo, I couldn't come up with anything that felt right. I recorded and discarded a number of attempts. When I got the idea to try an acoustic solo, suddenly everything just fell into place and felt right. In order to work, it couldn't be a traditional solo made up of single notes. Instead, the only way I was able to get the music to flow was to do chord inversions, variations, strums and arpeggios. I sat down in front of the mics and constructed the solo a section at a time, stringing together groups of ascending chord changes coupled with

small embellishments, letting it build to the dramatic pause at the end of the chorus. I think it's possibly my favorite guitar moment on the album.

But even with all of that detail, there was still something missing from the song. All along, as I worked on the song, I kept hearing holes for another instrument. I even found myself deliberately leaving spaces in the music that needed to be filled.

It was at this point that the song got nominated for a [Pegasus](#), just on the strength of people having enjoyed our public performances of it during the prior year. As part of the nomination process, I needed to send in a recording of the song, so that voters who hadn't yet heard it could download it. The recording I sent was an unfinished mix, with just the vocals, drums, guitars, and an unfinished MIDI bass line. I was flabbergasted later when it won, but for now, my goal was to finish it, and it was still missing some crucial glue.

When I told Vixy that I was having Alisa Garcia come down to do some piano, she was puzzled. She knew Alisa was great, but she loved the song as it was, and couldn't understand what the heck I was doing. I think she was worried I was somehow going to ruin the song by adding too many layers. She was skeptical, and said so, but shrugged her shoulders and let me do what I wanted.

At this point I need to describe a bit of the way my basement studio is set up. My desk, which contains the computer and monitors and all the other bits that I need to do the recording, is against the long wall. Vixy's computer desk is next to mine, against the same wall, to my right. [Blake's](#) Kurzweil piano synthesizer is actually behind us and to our left, facing away from us at an angle. So in order to do any recording on the piano, the person playing the piano has to have their back to anyone sitting at the desks. Additionally, since the piano is electronic, the usual steps required to isolate mic'd instruments aren't needed; it plugs straight into the A/D converter, so we don't even need headphones. We can play the mix through the studio monitors, and everyone in the room can hear what's going on as it's being played. So Vixy decided she would sit at her computer, work on some digital art, and listen while we recorded. There we were, the three of us, Alisa at the piano to my left and behind me, Vixy to my right.

We start tracking, and I'm more or less in charge of the recording session, giving Alisa direction and tips as we work our way through the process of laying down the piano track. Vixy, not wanting to distract from that dynamic, is being silent and just letting us work. Of course, Alisa's part is just marvelous. I already knew it would be; I could hear it in my head before I even asked her to play on the song. The song *needed* the piano part, and as Alisa played, I could finally hear the song the way I'd always imagined it. Alisa had a few wonderful surprises up her sleeve, but by and large, I knew she would be awesome, she was exceeding my expectations, and I told her so. My immediate reaction to hearing her play the part was mostly a sense of relief and satisfaction.

Then I looked over to my right.

Vixy had tears literally streaming down her face, and she was carefully stifling her sobs so that Alisa didn't get distracted by it. Alisa, consumed by her work and facing completely away from us both, had no idea. I smiled at Vixy knowingly, reached over, and squeezed her hand. She smiled back and nodded, and that's all we needed to say to each other about it.

When the session was done, poor Alisa, she couldn't understand why Vixy had been so quiet. She was worried that, despite my assurances that she'd done great, somehow Vixy wasn't pleased. She was so relieved to find out that Vixy's silence was because she was hiding tears of joy.

Apprentice

by Michelle Dockrey & Tony Fabris

About the Song

Vixy:

The good ship [Serenity](#) is full of interesting characters. But they all seem to be running from something, don't they? With most of them, it's fairly obvious; they're looking for a wider world, a world of more freedom than they've had; wild things trapped in narrow cages. But what about [Inara](#)? She's no wild thing. Why would she stay on this raggedy ship with this raggedy crew? What's she running from?

About the Songwriting

Vixy:

After "Mal's Song" gained us so many Browncoat fans — the most loyal folks there are — and we started getting specifically Browncoat gigs, I thought I should really write another Firefly/Serenity song. Covering all of Seanan McGuire's songs is all very well, but I could at least have more than *one!* :) I just sort of thought generally about the show and the movie for a while, and I couldn't remember ever hearing a song about Inara.

Now, just "a song about Inara" isn't enough to be the basis of a song; it's an idea, but every song has to have its emotional moment, its story, its "so what?" So I thought about what we know of her. And Joss drops a lot of hints about her that never really got expanded upon. There's the box she opens with a needle in it when threatened by Reavers, which Joss said in commentary is *not* a suicide drug. There's the general incongruousness of her personal elegance vs. her surroundings. And there was Nandi, who said that Inara had been a rising star among Companions, all set to be House Priestess and everything, and then said, "ask her sometime why she left." That hooked *me*. Why *did* she leave?

I had a vague idea that she was running from something, and there are all these songs out there about Mal and Kaylee and the war and being wild and free and running from the law and running from oppression and running from a small country life and being wild and free and wild and free and wild! It's an awfully Browncoaty theme, that. And if you take "wild and free" as the main Browncoat theme, that made me kind of go "...then what was *she* doing on that ship?" Inara was no wild thing. But maybe you don't have to be wild to want to run. Oh hey! Sometimes a phrase pops into your head that you just *know* is your hook.

But I was still struggling with the reason; I needed to invent a story for her. About this time I mentioned to Tony what I was writing and where I was stuck, and he had the perfect idea. Not too long before, we'd watched [Bring on the Night](#). There's a part of an interview where Sting says that what he likes about his life now is that he doesn't know what's going to happen next. When he was a schoolteacher, he said, there came a point where he could see himself and exactly where he'd be in five years, in ten years — deputy headmaster, headmaster, and so on — and it terrified him. Now, as a musician, he didn't know where he'd be in a year or what he'd be doing next, and that world of possibility made him so much happier.

That resonated so perfectly with me. Why someone like Inara would give up such a perfect life with security and potential and power, to go roving the 'verse with a bunch of bandits — it all fit. The rest was easy.

I can't remember at what point I decided the story would be told from the point of view of a novice at the Academy. I think that might have been pretty early on. Then I didn't *quite* have to put words in Inara's mouth, and I had something slightly more interesting than "hi here is my story" (a motif which I'm fine with, obviously, but I try not to do the same thing over and over.) I did a little fudging here and there; though it's definitely called "the Academy" in the show, I couldn't fit the word in anywhere that it would rhyme or scan. I settled on a bit of a cheat; Jacqueline Carey's *Kushiel* series of novels refer to the courtesans' Houses as the "Court of Night" or "Night Court". Except I needed two syllables, so I fudged from there to "Twilight" and hoped nobody would notice. :)

I steal — er, am influenced by — whatever catches my fancy, and in this case something from my childhood found its way into this song. Ever since I was little, one of my favorite books has been a retelling of the Cinderella story called *The Glass Slipper* by Eleanor Farjeon. In this version, Cinderella is announced at the ball as the Princess of Nowhere. Toward the end, when the Prince is looking for his lost Princess, the fairy godmother asks him to describe her. He says something like, "her eyes are like stars, her teeth are like pearls, her hair is like silk, her skin is like milk, and her lips are like roses." The fairy godmother replies, "Hoity-toity. All princesses are like stars, pearls, silk, milk, and roses," and tells him to think of something else to describe her.

That always stuck with me. We're *all* princesses, that said to me; pretty isn't what makes you a princess. And somehow that fit with the image of what a Companion is supposed to be. I could so easily imagine Inara saying something like this in teaching young novices. We're *all* pretty; that's only the beginning. A good Companion has to be so much more.

I also liked my little idea of the parallel structure of the roses—ring-doves—river, and hoped it wouldn't come across as completely stupid. :) It was also another bit of artistic license; I've never really heard "ring-doves" used anywhere except in Mary Stewart's Merlin trilogy (*The Crystal Cave* et al.), but it was alliterative and it scanned and I've always liked it. (Uncle Google seems to tell me that it's a term for Old World wood pigeons or turtledoves.)

All I knew for sure about the music was that I wanted something Eastern. I'm not good at describing to Tony what I want; I have no guitar vocabulary (other than the occasional "go like this: nuh nuh NUHHHHH nuh nuh" or something) so I usually resort to finding examples of other songs and saying "sorta like that". Prince's "Seven", Jeff & Maya Bohnhoff's "Persian Rose", and Sting's "Desert Rose" were all influences I brought up as I struggled to figure out what I wanted. Tony, as usual, was magic; he can listen to a song in its barest stages and hear things that aren't there, but *should* be. Apart from my insisting he stay on the same chord at a few places where he really wanted to depart to something different, I didn't have to do much work on that part at all.

One last secret — I improvise every one of those long twisty vocal lines, *every* time. I never have any idea how that's going to sound until the moment it comes out of my mouth. I do try to let it build over the course of the song, saving the bigger crescendos for later, but that's about it. This, also, was influenced by Maya Bohnhoff's singing in "Persian Rose". It doesn't always work out right, but if I can get that particular scale lodged in my head (sorry y'all; classically trained, I'm *not*) I usually do okay.

Tony:

Almost every guitar chord in the song is an E-family barre chord, but with the high B and E strings left ringing open. Vixy wanted something Persian-sounding, and I immediately went for those chords. They were taught to me by [Alex Lifeson](#) by way of Jeff Bohnhoff, and they probably date back to Led Zeppelin before that. A simple slow upward strum on those chords, and presto, instant sitar. (Yes, I know it doesn't *really* sound like a sitar.)

I love the way the chord progression on the bridge builds up to a powerful resolution. This is another case where, when writing the bridge with Vixy, I ended up just "going minor", but boy that sure works well, and sets up for a nice resolution back to the major chord progression of the verse. I'm particularly fond of how the lyrical revelation in the last line of the bridge combines with that dramatic resolution in the chord progression. I even did some tricks with the mix of the instruments to emphasize the bass on that section, to give it the proper impact. I just love it when all the elements of lyrics, music and production come together in such a perfect way.

About the Recording

Tony:

This is one of the last songs on *Thirteen* to have been recorded. It barely got finished at the end, along with *Strange Messenger*. We knew what we wanted early on, but didn't really have a way to achieve it with our own resources, so it sort of sat there untouched, left until the last minute.

We were talking to [Alexander Adams](#) at a Norwescon, the first time he'd actually seen us perform as a duo, and we'd mentioned during our set that we were making an album. Alec offered his services in mixing and mastering, and I remember I said something like, "I think we've got that part covered, but what we really need is a bit of this," making a bowing motion with my hands. He was very gracious and said, "I would be honored." We didn't have anything ready for him then, but later, at an Orycon, we caught up with him again and confirmed that we wanted him on a new song we'd just written, one that needed a vaguely Eastern feel to it. We said we wanted one track of [bodhrán](#) and one track of fiddle. We agreed on terms and I said I'd send him tracks in December when he had free time on his schedule.

So, December rolls around, and I needed to create the bed tracks for Alec to work from. I remember it was freezing in the studio and I didn't feel like doing all the necessary steps to warm it up to record something seriously. So I thought to myself, well this is only going to be bed tracks, there won't be any final guitar tracks yet, so I don't need the nice mics. All Alec needs is a fixed tempo and a chord outline. I rummaged around for a 1/4" to 1/8" cable adapter, and plugged my Taylor's pickup straight into my laptop's mic-in jack. I sat on the couch in the living room, put earbud headphones into my ears for the click track, and recorded the song while Vix watched TV. Sure the TV might bleed through a bit into the guitar pickup, but who cares, it's just bed tracks.

Now let me just say from the start that this is not the ideal way to record an acoustic guitar. Let's forget for a moment that the mic-in jack on a laptop is probably the one method of recording that will provide the worst possible quality. The biggest issue is that my Taylor is an older model, before they made the [expression system](#), so it has a more standard sort of [under-the-saddle piezo pickup](#). Actually, it uses a blended combination of a piezo pickup and a condenser microphone pickup, but that still doesn't help much. Piezo pickups, you see, have a tendency to sound like someone stepped on a poor, defenseless duck, and my Taylor is no exception. But hey, this is just bed tracks, I'll re-record the final guitar later.

Next, there's the issue of how to play the guitar part. Sure the chords may be simple, but the way it alternates between the sitar-like strums and the bubbly bass notes is tricky to play. I can pull it off live, where no one expects perfection, but it's a pain and I make a lot of mistakes. What I needed here was something that was perfectly tempo-locked for the bed tracks, so I decided to do the bass notes and the strums separately. While I was at it, I realized that the simple song structure lends itself well to looping, so each chord change became its own section, which got re-used, copied and looped as needed. I color-coded each chord change until the editor screen was a rainbow of chords. In very short order, I had the entire song laid out, with the bass notes on one track, and the strums and chorus arpeggios on another, and each bar fell precisely into the tempo groove without any drift or mistakes.

Then I dropped an echo onto the bass notes track, one that was tempo matched to the song. This is the trick I learned from Edge and David Gilmour; you get the echoes to fall on the eighth notes between the actual notes you're playing. I did it rather subtly here, instead of overt like they do it, because I think that's what the song called for. A bit of tweaking, EQ, and processing on the guitar got it sounding rather decent, with only the slightest bit of quacking duck remaining audible in the sound.

Within a day or two, Vix recorded a decent scratch vocal, I wrote a quick note vaguely describing the style I was looking for, zipped it up with the bounced tracks, and put the zip file on our file server. Then I sent Alec an email saying the parts were ready for his additions.

Then I waited.

And waited...

And a couple months later, eventually caught up with Alec and Kore at Soulfood Books in Redmond, and asked what was up. Turns out, they never got the email. AOL's spam filter had eaten it! Here we were, just

weeks from our planned mastering date, Alec had never received the bed tracks to work with, and his calendar was no longer free. Panic! Some discussions ensued, and he said he might be able to get to it before he left for Tennessee. I crossed my fingers and hoped.

The date rolled around, and then it turned out that Alec wasn't able to download the bed tracks because he's on a dial-up line. Wave audio files are huge, you see, so huge that it would be easier to mail a disc than to download them over a dial-up line. I'd hadn't even thought to check about that, I was dumb and just assumed everyone was on a broadband connection these days. So now Alec was off to Tennessee, and we still didn't have anything more than scratch tracks for the song.

But like the cavalry showing up at the end of the movie, Alec saved us! He returned from Tennessee, grabbed the bed track discs that I'd Fed-Ex'd while he was gone, and went straight into the studio, recording for an entire day, and editing and processing on the second day, to produce the wonderful results you can hear on the final album. He and Kore happened to be heading up to Everett that day, and since my house is right on the way, they dropped off the discs with the tracks.

And boy did he ever save us! I was so excited and pleased, I was just bouncing off the walls. We asked for a bodhrán and a fiddle. Alec gave us *eight* tracks, including fairly bells, zills, shaker, an asheko drum, and yes, bodhrán and fiddle. Oh wait, how about *three* fiddles, for an entire string section! We only asked for something vaguely Eastern-sounding, but in our simple scratch tracks, Alec somehow heard the exact same vision for the song that we'd had all along but didn't think we'd ever be able to achieve. He sculpted what can only be described as the perfect set of tracks for that song. When he called to arrange dropping off the discs, he said, "I got a little excited and did more tracks than you asked for. I hope that's okay..."

Yeah, Alec. It's okay.

Postscript: The poorly-recorded guitar? Yeah, of course it stayed in unchanged. It fit with Alec's tracks too well. With a little processing and mixing, you can't even tell there are ducks being trampled.

Red Right Hand

by Nick Cave, Mick Harvey, & Thomas Wydler
© Songs of Windswept Pacific obo Mute Song, Ltd.
(as performed by Vixy & Tony)

About the Song

Tony:

Red Right Hand is a Nick Cave song that Vixy loved. She found it on an X-Files soundtrack compilation album called *Songs in the Key of X*, although different versions of the song exist on Nick Cave's own albums, and in cover versions by other artists. According to the song's [Wikipedia entry](#), the phrase comes from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, where it seems to refer to a wrathful God, rather than a deceitful Devil as it does in this song.

As a cover tune, we have to purchase record company royalties in order to be able to republish it. It's surprising how easy it is to do that.

About the Songwriting

Tony:

When we decided to start covering this song in our live performances, we knew there was no way we could imitate the lush production of Nick Cave's original work. Since our favorite way of covering a song is to change it and make it our own, we decided to go for the minimalist approach, and make the arrangement as simple as possible. This brought the focus to the lyrics, which are wonderfully creepy.

The song is essentially a twelve bar blues, leaving me free to come up with anything I wanted on the guitar. The part I came up with is fun because my right hand ends up doing a thumping rhythm as I play the muted arpeggios that make up the verse sections. My hand doesn't turn red or anything, though.

Vixy chose to sing the song's main hook line completely differently than Nick Cave's original, turning his angry growl into her sultry torch-song slide. Sometimes making music is all about going for your strengths.

About the Recording

Tony:

We knew from the beginning that the only way this song was going to work on the album was if we kept the minimalist approach, duplicating what we do when we perform it live.

To that end, I wanted to actually *do it live*, no overdubbing, no processing, no editing, no reverb, no click track, just me and Vixy in front of the microphones together at the same time. In the back of my mind, I think I was trying to emulate an acoustic-only version of Depeche Mode's "Personal Jesus" that I'd been listening to for years.

After three unsatisfactory takes like that, Vixy wanted to strangle me. But I talked her into a fourth take, and that's the one that ended up on the album.

It's deliberately produced very dry and raw. Hopefully when you listen to it on headphones, it sounds like Vixy is singing right into your ears.

Persephone

by Michelle Dockrey

About the Song

Vixy:

You may have heard or read of the Greek myth of [Persephone](#). She's said to have been carried off by the King of the Underworld and held there for a time against her will. Because she ate four pomegranate seeds while she was there (or three, or six, depending on which version you happen to be reading), she became bound to return there for four (or three, or six) months out of the year, during which time her mother, Demeter, let the earth fall barren in her grief for her daughter.

But what if that's not how it was? What if it wasn't a kidnapping? What if she really loved him?

About the Songwriting

Vixy:

"Persephone" is, essentially, about falling in love with someone who's not right for you.

I was actually in a relationship like that when I started writing it, though at first I didn't think about the song idea quite so personally. In the beginning it was just an abstract idea — what if Persephone had actually fallen in love with Hades, and run away with him? What would that be like?

The idea was appealing. The daughter of the goddess of summer, nature, fertility, all that sunny and green sort of thing, in love with the king of a dark, cold, barren, underground place. They're about as incompatible as you could get, aren't they? And the idea appealed more as it became less abstract and more personal. I'm not claiming to have dated Hades or anything, but it was becoming clear we weren't compatible, and here was a big fat juicy metaphor ripe for the plucking.

I didn't finish the song until after the relationship ended; there's a time-honored tradition of songwriting as therapy. There are a few personal references, but mainly the thing is just painted in broad strokes of metaphor — he can never change to be like her, and she can never change to be like him. Night and day, light and dark, summer and winter.

Winter. That was really the hook. In a long-distance relationship, the majority of the time we'd spent together had been during cold weather — late fall, winter, or very early spring. It was just a coincidence, an accident of scheduling, but it made for interesting songwriting fodder. I'm a creature of sunlight, really; I'm at my best and happiest during the long summer days when sunset's at nine or ten, and I need my living spaces to be bright and sunny — for best results, give me a sunbeam to curl up in. "You only knew me in winter / so how could you know me at all" seemed like the perfect frame on which to hang the rest of the song.

About the Recording

Tony:

Persephone was something that materialized in spurts over the whole of the album's production period. Although the chords and song structure existed as-is before I came onto the scene, the individual instrumental parts for the *Thirteen* version were written and recorded in chunks. It was a lot of work getting it just right.

The chords for the basic background guitar were written by Vixy before we were partners, and were already performed in essentially the same style by Fishy, back when they were still Escape Key. Very early on (in fact it was among the first things we recorded for this album), I painstakingly re-recorded those same chords to a click track on the steel string, modifying the arpeggios so that the chord changes sounded comfortable and there weren't any note-stoppages as I switched chords.

I wrote the second layer of guitar (the leads/fills) by just improvising directly into the recording software, one section at a time. I originally recorded them all on steel string and later re-learned them off the recording and redid them all in nylon-string, to get that clear definition between the two parts. I actually bought a new nylon-string guitar just for recording that part, since my existing one had terrible intonation and couldn't stay in tune.

Vixy and I collaborated on writing the bass line, writing it a note at a time in MIDI, a maddening process which made Vixy want to strangle me several times. But we persevered and came up with a melody that pleased us both immensely. It was very nonstandard and didn't have a real "rhythm" to it, but rather did a meandering melody that complimented the other instruments. Someone later told us that's called a "non-walking bass line".

We printed out the MIDI notes as sheet music for a real bassist. We had intended the bass line to be recorded by Douglas McCarrison, and he even came in and tried doing some tracks, but what we recorded that day ended up being not usable for various reasons. I was very sorry about that, because I really wanted to use Douglas on the album, and he went out of his way to learn the part and do it for us. Sometimes in production, things like that happen. Near the end of production, at the last minute, I handed the sheet music to Chris Clark (the bassist on Thirteen and Erased) and he did the fantastic take that you hear on the final track.

Processing the sound of Chris' upright acoustic bass to make it fit with the song was very tricky in this particular case, even though the same bass dropped right into Thirteen and Erased with nary a problem. Sometimes you never know about these things.

All along, I'd envisioned that a violin should appear on the bridge, very dramatically. When Sunnie Larsen came in to play the part, it was the most amazing thing. She had nothing prepared ahead of time, she'd done all her preparation for Mal's Song and had come in expecting to record only that song. She didn't want to improvise something for Persephone, so during about 15 minutes of listening to repeated stop-and-start playbacks of the song, she wrote (and I mean [wrote with a pencil straight from her head onto sheet-music paper, Amadeus-style](#)) the entire violin part, which she then took over to the music stand and recorded flawlessly, sight-reading from the sheet music she had just written. It was probably the most amazing thing I've ever seen anyone do in the studio.

Vixy:

The trouble with writing a song about something personal you're going through is that eventually, you get over it. To perform any song effectively, you have to get the emotion across, and to do that, you have to feel it, at least a little bit. Otherwise you're basically just reciting words, and your audience feels the difference, even if they don't realize what it is that they're hearing/not hearing.

This made recording problematic. We did several takes of the final vocal, and they were technically proficient enough, but... kinda lackluster. They didn't sound right to me, and I was getting frustrated.

I knew why, of course. I wrote the song years ago; it's all over now. To work on the song properly, I needed to get back into the emotion of it. I'd have Tony stop talking to me for a minute, close my eyes, and call to mind all the things that had been the impetus for writing the song at the time. Then I'd open my eyes and say "hit it", and get a quick take while it was all still fresh in my mind. It worked, and when we were choosing which takes to use for the final mix, I deliberately left in a bit here and there where there was a wrong note or a slight vocal wobble, because it was the better performance emotionally.

Though the technique was incredibly effective, the downside was that whenever we were working on this song, I was bitchy and irritable as a result. I'm not kidding when I talk about how lucky I am to have Tony as a producer; I don't know anyone else who would've put up with what he's had to put up with.

Ah well... it's sort of like complaining that the \$100 bill you just found on the ground is too wrinkled.

Strange Messenger

by Michelle Dockrey & Tony Fabris

About the Song

Vixy:

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, German explorer and scientist [Alexander von Humboldt](#) traveled to South America, most of which still belonged to the Spanish Empire. Humboldt and his French companion spent five years travelling through a region that the Jesuits had left decades earlier.

The village of San Juan Nepomuceno de los Atures (called just Atures by that time) had been built by Jesuits in 1748, taking the last of its names from the native people of the region. But by the time Humboldt arrived, the Atures had disappeared, and the village was in a wretched state. The 47 people still living there spoke languages called Guahibo and Maco, and told Humboldt that the Atures, hunted by a people called the Caribs, had fled to an island in the Orinoco, and died there. All that was left were their tombs in a high mountain cave.

Humboldt [wrote](#):

"It is to be supposed that the last family of Atures did not die out until a long time afterwards: since at Maypures - bizarrely - there still survives an old parrot that nobody, say the natives, can understand, because it speaks only the language of the Atures."

- *Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent*, Alexander von Humboldt

- *Spoken Here: Travels Among Threatened Languages*, Mark Abley

Tony:

One of the best stories about the song happened shortly after our first public performance of the song (which was at Consonance 2008, right after we finished writing it). Seanan tells the story thusly:

Apparently, the words of one strange messenger DO mean something.

I spent my lunch hour walking, as I so very often do, and found myself singing as I walked. Now, once I realized I was singing, I also realized that the song I was in the middle of - 'I Can't Decide', by the Scissor Sisters - was, perhaps, not entirely appropriate, due to language. I promptly switched songs, selecting the much less offensive 'Strange Messenger', by the lovely Vixy.

For those of you who don't know, 'Strange Messenger' is based on one of the stories told about German explorer Alexander von Humboldt, who was one of the first Europeans to enter parts of South America. Supposedly, while he was traveling the Orinoco River, he found the burial ground of an entire lost tribe... and a single parrot who still remembered their language. Forty words of it. (...)

Whether this is true or not doesn't really matter; it's a beautiful story, and it sings to the pain of language, culture, and a people lost. Thanks to Vixy, the story itself can now be sung... and as I was turning off of Market Street, blithely sallying on by, a man grabbed my arm. To quote this unexpected participant in my day:

"I am so sorry, I really didn't mean to, I'm not trying to - IS THAT ABOUT HUMBOLDT'S PARROT?!"

Dude.

Turns out the gentleman is a professor of linguistics at a local college, and has been using that story in his classes for years now. So today, in my capacity as walking billboard, I sold a copy of an album that hasn't even been released yet.

Tomorrow: flying monkeys.

- from the blog of Seanan McGuire

About the Songwriting

Vixy:

I first heard the above story from my friend corvi, who I think was reading the second book referenced above, perhaps a year or two ago. My first thought was that this was one of the most terrible, tragic things I'd ever heard. My second thought was "I'm going to turn that into a song, and I'm going to make people CRY."

The lyrics weren't so difficult; the tragedy of the story is clear. I just had to avoid any hint of "aw poor lonely parrot," which isn't the point at all. I read what I could about Humboldt; among other things, I learned that he wrote a four-volume work called *Cosmos* (which in modern publication is subtitled *A Sketch of the Physical Description of the Universe (Foundations of Natural History)*, which should give you some idea of the scope of the work!) I wanted to work that into the lyrics somehow. Also, settling on a single adjective to characterize an entire language was... well, I was about to write "no easy task," but actually it was kinda fun. My first thought for German was "bold", but I needed two syllables (and anyway I'd already used "bold explorer"). I forget what other two-syllable adjectives I went through before settling on "fearless". (I don't actually *speak* German, so I just had to go by how it sounds to me generally when I hear it spoken.) English was surprisingly easy. Our grammar rules are consistent except when they're not, our spelling rules were cobbled together from a bazillion other languages, our phonetics make sense *most* of the time, if you can keep in mind a rather complex series of rules about different letter combinations, but make frustratingly little sense if you look at individual letters. I didn't set out with a definition and then look for a word to fit it; I set out with a number of syllables to fill (I was originally going for the word "or" plus a three-syllable word), but "[mercurial](#)" popped almost instantly into my head. I remember we were in a restaurant or something and Tony asked me what the word meant. A woman at the next table, overhearing the conversation, couldn't help but chime in that "mercurial" was *emphatically* the word to describe the English language. I think that's when I began to have real confidence in the song; there probably aren't too many songs out there that speak to the interests of linguists. :)

The difficulty was a melody. At the point when I had two verses and a chorus, I still didn't have a melody that I liked. Worse, I *did* have a melody that I *hated*. Sometimes things will pop into your head that you *don't* want. This awful cheesy preachy Hallmark-TV-special theme song melody had lodged itself in my brain and wouldn't leave.

(Someone recently paid me the kindness of saying that I'm "incapable of writing a bad song". If only they knew. It's actually just that I'm capable of recognizing the bad ones before anyone else gets a chance to hear them.)

The only way to exorcise that particular demon was to get the *right* melody going. I had this vague idea that I wanted the song to sound sort of Latin, but the only thing I knew how to do was put it in 6/8 time. Tony and I worked for what seemed like ages, noodling and trying things and just not getting anywhere. I was actually on the point of giving up on the song entirely when we took a deep breath and tried a different approach. Instead of trying so hard to get a specific pick pattern or a specific melody, we backtracked a bit and got more basic. Tony came up with this haunting minor chord progression that I liked, and instead of trying to sing the lyrics, I just hummed along loosely with the chords. I got out my trusty little digital recorder and recorded him playing and me singing my little cascade of ooo's and aaah's, and we put the song away to percolate a bit.

Later on I was able to listen to that and sort of force the existing lyrics into 6/8 time, and give them a more defined melody, and finish the last verse. Tony worked his usual guitar magic, and lo, we had a song. Be grateful to Tony, everyone, because it's thanks to him that you hear what you hear instead of the awful One-Tin-Soldier-esque version that tried to escape and set itself loose on the world. (Yes, the melody still exists in my head. No, I won't sing it for you.)

About the Recording

Tony:

This was the last song to get written and recorded for *Thirteen*, with portions of it being finished only days before we went to mastering.

Jeff and Maya Bohnhoff were the cavalry on this one, recording Maya playing bongos, shaker, and goat's feet (yes, you read that right, *goat's feet*) the weekend before Consonance, which was just a few weeks before our mastering date. They squeezed it into a busy schedule, timing it perfectly so that I got the tracks just a few days before Jeff got laid up with a painful attack of kidney stones.

What I had supplied the Bohnhoffs was a guitar chord progression, a click track, and a rough scratch vocal. The scratch vocal was especially rough, having been the very first time Vixy ever sang the song seriously all the way through. Her opening phrase of the scratch vocal wasn't even at the right pitch, it took her a bit before she was able to find her opening note. We didn't even bother to turn off the furnace before pressing the Record button. These were just guide tracks after all.

Of course, we get the rhythm tracks from Jeff and Maya, and they're just perfect. We're getting ready to head off to Consonance and I've only got Maya's tracks partially edited and mixed, intending to finish the work at the con. We only had couple weeks to go before we had to go to mastering, so Vixy and I talked about doing a final vocal for the song before leaving for the con. You know, just in case she picked up [con crud](#) and couldn't sing when we got back. We decided not to record the final vocal just then: Vixy assured me she wouldn't get sick, and I really would have preferred to get all the backing tracks finished first, anyway.

So we head off to Consonance, and I spend most of the con with my head buried in the laptop, editing and mixing Maya's tracks as well as continuing to work on mixes for the other songs on the album.

And of course, Sunday, Vixy picks up con crud. Really *bad* con crud. Like, it took two months to go away. Winter/spring 2008 was a really bad season for rhinoviruses; everyone I know who caught a cold that season, including me, was completely devastated by it for weeks and weeks. In Vixy's case, it even prevented us from going to Norwescon a couple weeks later.

The day after Consonance, we're looking at the schedule and I realize that Strange Messenger isn't going to make it onto the album unless we can get a vocal. And we're not going to get a vocal out of Vixy this week, the cold is only going to get worse. So with the last vestiges of her remaining voice, I stuck her behind the microphone and made her re-sing the opening phrase. She was able to do it, barely, on the first take, then collapsed into a coughing fit and could sing no more.

So what you get on the album is Vixy's scratch vocal, the very first time she ever sang the song seriously all the way through. And an opening phrase that was sung under duress and while deathly ill. I had to put a whole series of notch filters on it to get rid of the furnace's hum, but I think it sounds pretty good in the final mix.

Vixy:

After hearing about this, Seanan asked me something like, "And did you learn a little lesson, then?" Did we *ever*. No matter what you're doing, treat *everything* as if it were the final take. Wait 'til the dogs outside stop barking, have a good drink of water, and TURN THE STUPID FURNACE OFF.

Companion

by Michelle Dockrey & Tony Fabris

About the Song

Vixy:

"Companion" was inspired by the current incarnation of the TV show [Doctor Who](#). It's sung from the point of view of [Rose](#), the Companion in 2005 and 2006... or from anyone who's been the companion of someone inspiring and incredible in their life.

Tony:

For those studying at home: "[Companion](#)" is the song about [The Doctor](#), and "[Apprentice](#)" is the song about the [Companion](#). That's going to be on the test.

About the Songwriting

Vixy:

This song was born because my husband (known to our friends as Fishy) and I had been watching the new version of *Doctor Who*. I'd seen some of the old episodes, but he was really the diehard fan, so I wasn't as familiar with the show's history. Early in the second season, several longtime fans started remarking to me that Rose, the Companion, was probably due to leave the show soon. Companions never stay too long, they said; certainly not more than two seasons. Pretty soon she'd be replaced, they said.

This made me watch each new episode with this incredible, intense dread. I began asking Fishy nervous questions like, "do Companions ever... *die*? Do they ever get just left behind without warning?" I could hardly bear to watch.

It wasn't just that she might die. It was that — even if she got dropped off, had a wonderful life and lived happily ever after — *she wouldn't get to be the companion anymore*. I identify strongly with fictional characters pretty easily, often almost unconsciously, and this was one of the strongest times ever; I was absolutely dreading the day when she'd have to say goodbye.

I explained this to Fishy and he was just kind of mildly baffled. I asked him, "Didn't you ever feel that way, watching the old show for all these years? Don't you feel that way now? Don't you feel this dread that the Companion is going to have to say goodbye and lose all this?"

Now, I have to explain a little bit about my husband. He tries things and does things that most people would never think of trying, things that I used to think to myself, people can't do that. I mean, individuals, without tons of money or a business or a huge industrial facility, people just don't *do* that. Blacksmithing, smelting, bio-engineering, filmmaking, metal casting. Building things from scratch, from model rockets to theremins to hovercraft. Robotics, from the simple chase-toy he made for my cat to the freefall robot that he helped a team to build and take up on NASA's Vomit Comet (twice). He asks himself, well, why *don't* people do that? And then figures out why — the *practical* reasons why, what knowledge and tools people would need to make it safe and feasible, and how to overcome those obstacles. He's the same way when there's a problem; I once had a cancer scare, an abnormal test result that had me petrified with fear, and his response was to find out as much information as there was about what was possible and what was likely and what wasn't, and suddenly it was all so much less frightening. Knowledge is the most powerful weapon there is. His love of trying new things is happily infectious; since we've been together I've tried rock climbing, glassblowing, kendo, iaido, kayaking, film acting, blacksmithing, and, as a matter of fact, filking. I shudder to think what my life was like before, and what it would've gone on to be like if I'd never met him. It's really no exaggeration at all to say that he changed my life.

So, to return to the scene in our living room: I was asking him, didn't he ever feel this sadness and dread in sympathy with the Companion, when he or she was about to lose the Doctor?

He'd never thought of it; it had simply never occurred to him. He said, a little apologetically, and a little sheepish-grinnily, "...I guess the companion isn't so much the one I identify with."

I think I actually stopped breathing for a while. *This* is why I identified so strongly with the companion. This is why I cried and cried when she had to leave him. *He's my Doctor.*

I pretty much *had* to write a song after that.

The lyrics were a challenge, but a fun one; I needed to make every line apply both to the Doctor and to Fishy. It was a song about how I felt, and why I identified with the Companion, but I also wanted the song to stand alone. Careful fans will recognize references to episodes from 2005 and 2006 in nearly every line.

I won't go over every single reference (at least, not here) but there's just one I want to mention. There's a scene toward the end of the episode "The End of the World" when we first learn about the Time War. Rose asks, "What about your people?" The Doctor replies, "I'm a Time Lord. I'm the last of them. They're all gone. I'm the only survivor. I'm left travelling on my own because there's no-one else."

Rose gets this look on her face, and says, in this helpless sort of voice, "There's *me*..."

That line just clutched at my heart. *It may not be much, but it's all I've got to offer... you have my companionship, if you want it. Even if you've got nobody else... you've got me.* There are a few moments from this show that have burned themselves deeply into my brain, and that was one of the deepest. It has its place of honor in the bridge of the song.

Speaking of the bridge, I've probably said it elsewhere, but melodies are usually *hard* for me. I had lyrics enough for maybe a verse or two and some idea of a chorus, but I couldn't figure out a melody or even really settle on a rhythm, and as usual, I was frustrated. And as usual, Tony came through. I had a vague idea of a style I wanted — I didn't even want to copy the actual musical style, necessarily, but I wanted to write a song that would give the same *feel* as a particular Dave Matthews song.

Now really. Could I have *been* any more vague? But once more, all I had to do was play a little bit of the song for Tony. He came up with a simple, four-chord progression that didn't sound *anything* like the song I'd played him — but somehow, it was exactly what I wanted. It felt right, and in seconds, a melody popped into my head, and I burst into tears on the spot because it was so *right*. (I do that. It's a thing.)

The rest of the melody pretty much flowed, and when I got to the chorus, I had a different melody but it wanted the same chord progression. Now I was nervous — wouldn't it be boring if we just used the same four chords over and over? I worried about having a song that was too repetitive. Tony assured me that plenty of established artists have done it with fewer chords and been quite successful, like Fleetwood Mac with their song "Dreams" ("all two chords of it," as someone we know used to say).

Maybe everyone's too busy listening to the words, anyway.

Tony:

As we worked on the chords and the melody for the song together, we kept coming back to the same repeated chord progression: D, Am, C, G. It was so catchy, it took serious and deliberate effort to pry us away from simply repeating that progression through the entire song. Fortunately we were able to change it up a bit near the end of each chorus and on the bridge. If we hadn't managed to do that, we would at least have had some existing precedent to cite: In addition to "Dreams" by Fleetwood Mac, "Free Falling" by Tom Petty is more or less two chords total (if you don't count the suspensions), with the same progression on both the verses and choruses. I'm sure there are many similar examples.

About the Recording

Tony:

The drums are Scott Irwin's work again. I'm very pleased with some of the things he played, especially the fills around the bridge and during the ending repeats. He's a very tasteful drummer.

The call-and-response vocals on the chorus were something that Vixy had written into the song from the beginning, even before it had a melody. On the finished album, the "response" half of the call-and-response vocals (the "time for laughter time for tears" parts) are Vixy's scratch tracks for the song. We re-recorded a final lead vocal as planned, but at the end of the project, we decided to keep the response tracks without changing them. Vixy originally planned on the response lines being sung by a different person, but inertia, having gotten used to the scratch tracks, and lack of time, together conspired to make them stick as-is.

Almost immediately after we finished writing the song, the idea hit me to process the response lines behind layers of effects. I wanted them to sound slightly otherworldly, and sonically distinct from the lead vocal. I've heard many other songs get good results with that sort of thing when the song structure called for it, and I could hear it pretty clearly in my head.

Perhaps it was because my initial stab at the vocal processing was too extreme, but Vixy took an instant dislike to it. She didn't like the way her voice sounded when overprocessed, and we got into some rather big fights about it. I tried to show her examples of places in other artists' songs where it had been used successfully, but she correctly argued that this situation was completely different than the examples. Eventually, after I carefully tweaked the effects, she finally came around and agreed that it was what the song needed. Now neither of us can remember what it sounded like without the effects, and we both agree it fits the song perfectly.

Vixy:

Really what I didn't like about the initial processing was that it was so extreme as to sound totally cheesy. It didn't help that Tony had described it as wanting to make it sound "space like"; I had never, *ever* intended this song to sound like anyone's idea of "outer space music". Everything I've ever heard that was meant to sound "space like" was either 70's or cheesy or both; I had horrible visions of this disco *Star Wars* album we had when I was little. And I swear the initial tries had so much phase shifting as to make the lyrics nearly unintelligible.

After a lot of persuasion, I promised to at least *listen* to a new version of it before putting my foot down. But the actual process of adjusting the effects sounded so much to me like someone torturing my voice that I had to leave the room while he did it.

In the end, the vocal processing on those bits sounds more like the chorus of the song "Are You Out There" by Dar Williams than anything else. This was something I could live with, because I'd never have described the voices in that song as sounding "space like"; it's a song about radio, and they just sound like voices coming over radio transmissions.

Tony:

The lead guitar got done towards the end of the recording process, after a few aborted attempts to come up with a decent counterpoint to the rhythm guitar. Part of the inspiration for the lead guitar was the basic sound of it. I was just cycling through factory presets on my effects processor, and trying out riffs and chords. I happened upon one that was named "Phasers in Space", and its combination of compressed jazz tone combined with stereo phase shifter fit perfectly into the mix. I improvised the entire lead guitar part into the recording software, a section at a time, inspired mostly by the way the interesting sound laid onto the existing chords and melody. I double-tracked in a couple of sections where I needed the chords to build up to a crescendo, and it was done.

One of the phrases in the lead guitar part was suggested by Susan. As I was in the middle of working on it, she asked me if I would be incorporating the Doctor Who theme music into the song at all. Until that

moment, it hadn't occurred to me to even consider that possibility, since our song was so stylistically different from the TV theme. But it just so happened that I was trying to come up with phrases at that time, so the first three notes of the theme music became the basis for a few of the lead guitar bits you hear in the song. I tried to make them fairly prominent, as sort of an homage, much like David Gilmour did on "One of These Days". But the song sounds so different from the TV theme music that no one ever notices them.

The electric bass guitar part was the second bass guitar track I ever played, the first being the one for Mal's Song. This one was incredibly fun to do, and I wish I could have kept going longer at the end of the song. I want to write more songs with a bouncy beat so that I can do more of it.

The long fade-out at the end of the song was something I'd been planning since the day we wrote it. The extra layers of improv vocals during the fade-out, however, were a last-minute addition, pieced together from multiple takes. I had Vixy get behind the mics for an experimental attempt at doing some improv lines, and after about four of the takes, started piecing together the good bits in the editor. At first I thought we'd have only one line of improv, but as I was working on it, it just didn't seem like enough. When I finally decided to multi-layer the improv lines, I looked over at Vixy and said, "do you trust me?", then began to start splicing and hacking until I had what you hear on the final recording. I think we ended up with four tracks of vocals at the end: The lead vocal line, the "anything is possible" response lines, and two overlapping tracks worth of improv lines. Vixy loved it so much that she kept pushing for the ending tail of the fade to be louder, so everyone could hear every last nuance of it.

The long fade sounded so *right* that it influenced the overall song order on the album significantly. Part of me wanted to have the album titled *Thirteen*, but with the song "Thirteen" being the thirteenth track on the album. It would have been such a cute gag (hey look, the track counter on the CD player is showing both the song title and the album title), but Companion was far too powerful a closing song to let that happen.