

ECHOES

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Way back then, in DARK STAR 3, I wheeled out something called 'Gene Clark: Zenmaster', a highly personal crit of the myth-spinner himself, whose music I have always been so affected by (God, I'm so affected) that I'm practically pickled in it by now. Get the picture; it was more a work of spiritual necessity than an earnest attempt to impress the hell out of y'all with my erudition. Apparently it had various results -

- 1) It turned some lucky characters on to Gene Clark. (Q.E.D. - that which was required to be done. Good show.)
- 2) Some Gene Clark buffs experienced cardiac arrests, attacks of apopleptic rage and similar and, in general, the excretia hit the air-conditioner. Good show, also. Some people just won't listen...
- 3) A few hacks picked up on the 'Zenmaster' tag.

And so it was that with Harold Eugene safely installed in the monolithic Mayfair Hotel alongside fellow ex-fowls McGuinn and Hillman - both in the twilight of their powers - your petrified reporter and entourage (the lovely Dippy and eccentric old retainer Prockter) were granted an audience by RSO records in the diminutive and most concerned shape of Helen Walters (thank you) and I began to suss how a Kamikaze pilot must have felt, because I guessed I had been a modicum ... controversial ... in my published views of genial Gene's life's-works. Maybe he was into trashing Holiday Inns and general mayhem like so many groupie-gobbling rockstar nasties who've bought Topanga Canyon hangouts from sales of ten million units of vinyl sweetness and light. Hadn't I once nearly engaged in fisticuffs with a totally smashed Tim Buckley in a BBC radio controlroom drama?

What I was really after was some guaranteed-safe answering-machine labelled 'Gene Clark' that was gonna supply regulation-issue answers to probing questions which would sit nice and quiet alongside the 'Zenmaster' piece and give it the Penetrating Insight Seal of Approval. Instead, I got a soft-talking, light-footed, somewhat shy and stooped, articulate and complex man of the same name; no guru (no way) but someone whose internal balance is so tuned and functioning that travelling on the tube later felt like being prisoner of a psychotics' picnic: Someone who was clearly upset by the low burble of London traffic outside the window, almost inaudible to the dulled senses of us citypeople.

So we took our appointed place for the obligatory forty-minute conveyorbelt interview slot; I with some nebulous and involved concepts buzzing about in the braincells, waiting patiently Indian-file to find release through the vocal mechanisms. Would rapport be established, contact made, and a happy ending come bursting in like Karl Malden with a reprieve from the Governor for Jimmy Cagney? In short, was hotshot cub critic Stevie B. due to be unmasked as a pompous charlatan? Oh ye of little faith, myself included. Here's the transcript...



D.S. I read somewhere that after you left The Byrds you tried to form a new band; can you tell me something about that?

G.C. You're talking about the Gene Clark Group; we had a good idea of what we wanted to do. Chip Douglas was in the group playing bass. He later went on to produce records for The Monkees. A man named Bill Reinhart on guitar, who was a very good friend and a good musician. Joel Larson - he was The Grassroots drummer, the original Grassroots. We all got together, but it was too soon for me to try and put something together was what it really amounted to. It wasn't that the musicians in the group weren't good enough or anything like that. It just wasn't formed under the right circumstances. It dissolved in about three months - maybe six months. It was a long time ago, and things happen so fast.

D.S. Then you cut the Gosdin Bros album and some additional tracks with Leon Russell...

G.C. Yes, I did cut some other tracks with Leon which haven't been released. I know where there are some copies of them.

D.S. Were they orchestrated along the lines of "Echoes"?

G.C. They were orchestrated by a big band, y'know, as a matter of fact it was pretty good stuff. A real R'n'B kinda thing which was unusual for me at that time. One ballad and one heavy R'n'B thing was recorded for a single with Hugh Masekala producing which is an excellent record. I wish I could find that one, I'm looking for that right now. I've contacted his old partner, trying to get the tapes or a copy.

D.S. You also recorded enough material for between two or three albums just before Dillard & Clark, didn't you?

G.C. Yeah, I really did. Also several things for Columbia Records produced by Gary Usher. None of that has ever been archived yet.

D.S. Have you re-recorded any of that material?

G.C. No, never.

D.S. Why did you decide to drop "Elevator Operator" from the re-mixed version of "Gene Clark & The Gosdin Bros"?

G.C. It was so hard to re-mix because there was feedback of some sort when we moved it from eight-track to stereo panning. There was this feedback that didn't show up on the original eight-track with split stereo but did on the panning. It was almost impossible to re-mix it.

D.S. Why did you decide to re-mix it anyway - weren't you happy with the original?

G.C. The original was okay for a mix at that time probably, but I felt as though we could get a better sound with the equipment we have now - actually I do believe we got a better fidelity.

D.S. Listening to "Through The Morning, Through The Night" I get the impression that basically there was something wrong with the chemistry of the group. It's a very schizophrenic album - what exactly was happening between Doug Dillard and yourself? Are you on all the tracks in fact?

G.C. I was on every track. Nothing was really happening between Doug and I as friends; it's just that he had things he wanted to do and I had things I wanted to do, so we tried to find the best medium to do them in. But I am playing on all the tracks, so is Douglas. But we didn't have enough time to rehearse and work up material. We were requested to do a second album very quickly and we cut "Through" as quickly as we could. It was a fun album to record. It's interesting you brought that up because before we left for a short tour of The States just before this tour, I put that record on the turntable one day - hadn't listened to it for a long time - and I really enjoyed listening to it. It was schizophrenic in one respect, but in another respect it was something we were attempting to do, but we didn't have the time to sophisticate like we had on the first album, where we took several months to rehearse things - talk it over, really get the arrangements and harmonies.

D.S. Could you tell me why the title doesn't appear on the cover of "White Light"?

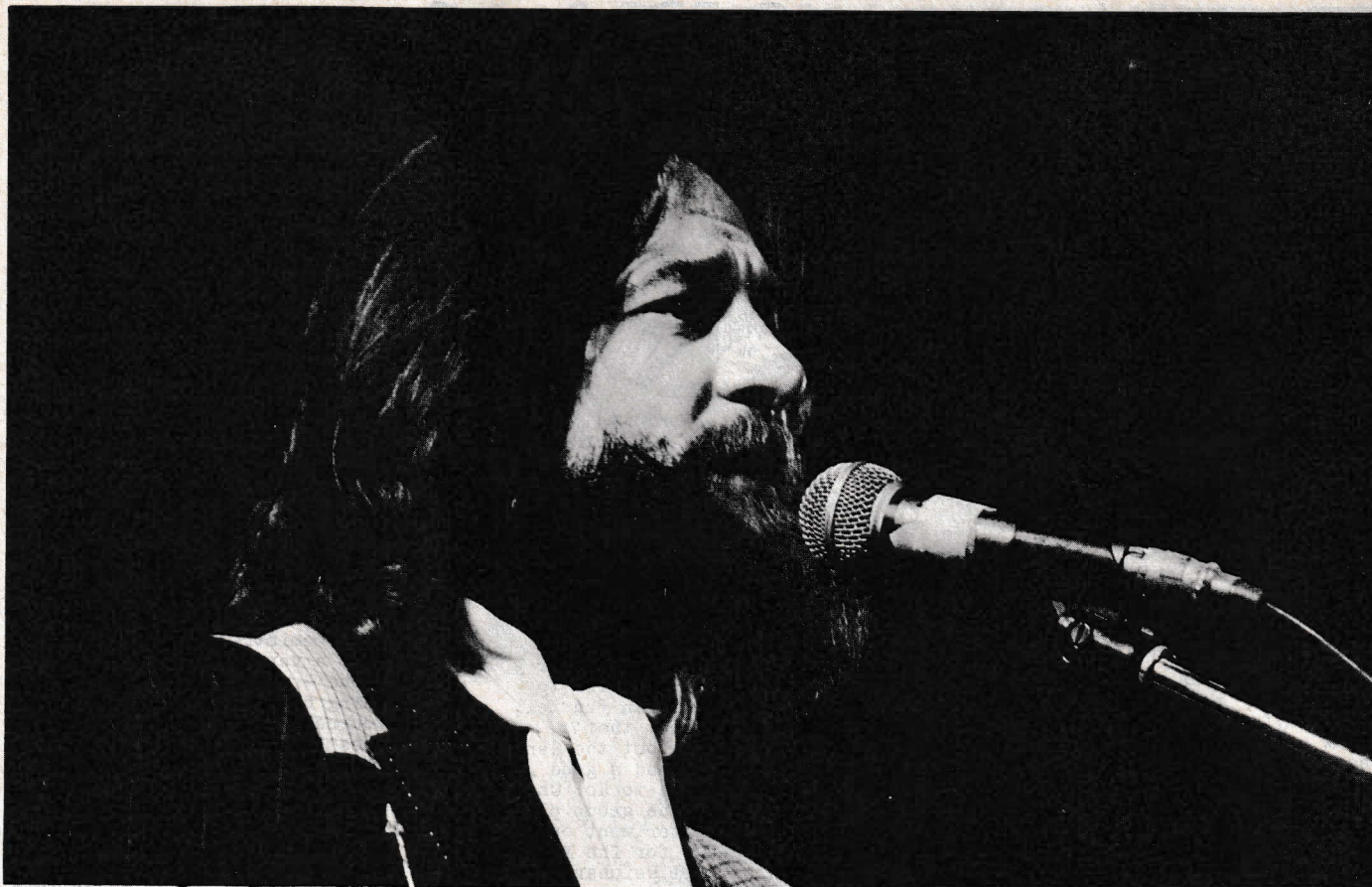
G.C. That I don't know... I have no idea. It was obviously something the Art Department decided to do.

D.S. Did you have any idea that "Roadmaster" was going to be released?

G.C. No - that was an album that could have been a great album but it was cut off in the making of it. It turned into an expensive project, which was not necessarily anyone's fault, but we seemed to keep getting into problems; getting the musicians, getting the right settings and so forth. We ended up with one of those half-finished products which later someone went in and mixed to the best of their ability.

D.S. I have to say it doesn't strike me as an unfinished album - what exactly is missing?





G.C. ... Unfinished in the original concept of the album. We would have liked to re-cut a couple of songs and got the arrangements even better than they were on some of those things. One of those projects that was just cut off at a certain point, y'know.

D.S. What made you want to re-record "She Don't Care About Time"?

G.C. So many people said they really loved that song...

D.S. I love the original - whose idea was the Bach middle-eight guitar solo?

G.C. McGuinn's. We were listening to a lot of Bach and jazz; that's also where "Eight Miles High" came from, the jazz/John Coltrane thing.

D.S. Who is Chris Hinshaw (Producer of "Roadmaster")?

G.C. Chris Hinshaw and I were old friends... not real old friends, but friends that had worked on another project before, and had also worked on another short-lived project producing Sly Stone. He's a very good engineer by the way, and someday will make an excellent producer.

D.S. What I really want to talk about is "No Other" - a lot of people think of it as your masterpiece.

G.C. A lot of people do - I explain to a lot of people that "No Other" is not the complete "No Other" album on that record. It was originally a thirteen-track album, but we weren't able to do a double-record and so the rest of the songs were left unfinished. Because of the length of the cuts we couldn't include them. "No Other" I really consider is a great album myself, I'm very proud of it. But I was very disappointed and let down after its release that it didn't go any further than it did - and I don't even know all

the reasons. Ironically enough it is now being re-released and is getting more attention now than it ever did then. Now "Two Sides", the new album, is much like "No Other" in a funny respect because it's the kind of album which sort of slips by you for a while, then after going back to it after a period of whatever time it takes, you really start hearing it. Some people say to me, 'I really love the new album, but "No Other" sucks', and some people say, 'I really love "No Other" but the new album sucks'. Usually what happens is that they have paid more attention to one or the other... they haven't gotten into one to the degree that they have the other.

D.S. "Two Sides" is rather like a Gene Clark sampler...

G.C. It's kind of an archive in a respect, which was planned that way because we needed, I felt, and Tommy (Thomas Jefferson Kaye, producer and rhythm guitarist in Gene's K.C. Southern Band) felt, because of our disappointment and let-down in the fact that "No Other" didn't do as well as it might, that we needed to make a stepping-stone to what we really wanted to do. I don't know if you saw last night's show or not, but we do a lot of new material that will be recorded on the next album which goes back to "No Other" and joins the new influence.

D.S. Is it going to be the 'cosmic-Motown' thing?

G.C. ... er... (laughs)... well...

D.S. You described "No Other" as a transitional album...

G.C. Yes, it was a transitional album; it was a definite statement and a hard album to record. Not hard in a painful sense but hard in a sense of being so different to the musicians who

recorded it. It took them a while to adjust to the approach Tommy and I were taking. We recorded the "No Other" track itself for a week before we got a take - we kept recording and the musicians were going crazy. Finally, the night we recorded it we called up Joe Lala and he came down, listened to it a few times, said (imitates accent) 'I've got it!' and - wow - we cut it! It was just that added percussive feeling that had been missing all along that we needed to bring it all together. He and Butch (Trucks) really got together on that one.

D.S. That track is really dense; more so than the rest of the album.

G.C. Right. I would like to continue on that path myself, too, but the album ended up... the colours on the album ended up to be pretty good.

D.S. We tend to feel that the cover is so totally different from the record that it's not really supposed to have anything to do with it.

G.C. That's right! Actually, the cover originally started out as a hoax, a joke; as a thing we were gonna do just to see if we could do it. Some friends of mine and this make-up artist that I know; we went ahead and did it. The people in the art department, who were progressive people anyway, were so appreciative of it... said, 'Wait-aminnit! Let's do this!' (laughs) In a way it was a bit of a shock to me but... (pauses and then grins)...

D.S. What happened over here was that very few albums had the inner sleeve insert with all the information and people were totally baffled. Anyway, how did you get signed to Asylum to begin with? Was it through



making the reformed original Byrds album?

G.C. Yeah, through the Byrds album and also because at that time Asylum was a lot like RSO is now. They were very into the acts that they signed and the people that they wanted.

D.S. Did they give you a limit of units of product to shift or anything? Why are you no longer with them?

G.C. That's a really complicated situation, because it was one of those things. When they formed Elektra/Asylum they had a lot more product right at that time. I think that a lot more time would have been devoted to the album but also at that time David Geffen moved out of management, and I hadn't signed management like Joni and a lot of other people had, so I feel that I kinda got lost in the shuffle.

D.S. It seems strange that a label is supposed to have such integrity...

G.C. I'm not saying that they don't - it's just that, well, it's still very much a hot label seeing who they have still got. With me it wasn't the staff or anything, just that with my own disappointment at the temporary failure of "No Other" as a commercial venture, I ended up not really being able to get to the next product, which was "Two Sides".

D.S. You recorded that very soon afterwards?

G.C. I got a release from Elektra/Asylum and then Tommy and I got together and independently produced "Two Sides". Then Al Coury at RSO picked up on it and said, 'Okay, let's go'. I think because he was sensitive to the fact that the album is a stepping-stone to the direction in which we really wanted to go and the direction we were headed in "No Other" and so forth.

D.S. You've been quoted as saying that you regard "Two Sides" as being more mature, lyrically...

G.C. I think it is more mature lyrically in one main respect, because the statements as abstract as some of them are, like I said earlier it's that whole thing about listening for a while, are simplified to where they are better understood. That may not be true for yourself and it might not even be true, I'm just saying that my feeling is that it is more mature lyrically in my own writing - in the songs that I wrote. The statements that are made are made without leaving an abstract question, even though it may contain abstract images, but the end result of that statement is... what it means.

At this particular point in the proceedings, it was becoming increasingly obvious that Gene Clark was exactly the man I'd hoped I'd meet. Microphone forgotten, Gene leaning forward conspiratorially, laugh-lines creasing with good humour, we were at the point where ambiguities dissipate and fall away.

Since Gene's last words could only satisfy someone on good-neighbour terms with Zen, I opened the gates on those questions kicking their heels to come out, and told

him how, to us, his abstractions came from the inner language and logic of Zen (and other human labels) without the usual obligatory posturing of any musician half-conscious of the fact that music comes from a separate place and that forces are working through him. (In any other situation, one might call such jive 'suicide'.)

G.C. I've made this statement several times: Zen, per se, is not just an art, it's not just a religion, it's a realisation. I've many times had discussions with people who I consider to be very high people, one person - as commercialised as he is - David Carradine, who is very into Zen and who is one of my better friends. The whole Zen thing - I'll make one thing clear - I don't claim to be a guru, or a leader or anything like that because I think that's the first point people really lose on...

D.S. You say that clearly through the music, anyway. "Strength Of Strings" for example; music is so ultimately subjective that it's a very Zen form because you don't actually rationalise it. "Strength Of Strings" is about the power of music and nothing more.

G.C. Right. That is what it boils down to, simplified.

D.S. On "Spanish Guitar" as well. I find all these things running through - do you consciously work that way?

G.C. ... No... I consciously and subconsciously work on them, but the actual writing of a song usually comes in the form of a realisation. Might be in a dream - the whole of "Some Misunderstanding" was written in a



dream. I got up and wrote it down... I woke up - I was married at the time - and I told my wife, 'Look, I've gotta get up, turn on the lights for a moment and write this down'. I wrote the song in completion because the dream was still fresh in my mind. I can't contrive a song.

D.S. Take "Silver Phial"...

G.C. "Silver Phial" was written in a state of, could I say, meditation? I had a house on the ocean at that time in Northern California. I was just sitting watching the waves come in. It was real quiet and... okay... here it is.

D.S. The reason I mention that song is because it has the word 'fix' in it and that of course is totally ambiguous, it's a pun, it has a double meaning. Did it just come to you or was this something you worked on?

G.C. It was shortly after Gram Parsons died, also, which was a heavy thing for me due to my companionship with him. It was heavy for all of us, but the thing of 'fix' can mean fix in any respect...

D.S. I took it to mean a bearing.

G.C. Yes, a fix... a bearing. My feeling about saying that was if you fix yourself in such a pattern that you haven't got any channels of release or escape to go out, look, think about it and come back in - I'm trying to find the right way to say it - the thing about Zen and the form of music is that Zen to me is only a tuning, but it is a spiritualism. A lot of people have said, 'Your music has such spiritual undertones', but you take a film-maker, a director, an actor, a poet, a novelist; if they don't have a tuning to the inner-self some-



thing can't come through them. I do believe it's all here for us to have, y'know, but you've got to find a place where you can hear it and if it happens that way, any great movie, great poem, great novel are all performed out of soul-searching. To me, that's a simplification of Zen and music. Zen is everything... as far as Zen goes (laughs).

D.S. Nobody has ever approached the subject in quite the way you have. Thematically, "White Light" and "No Other" have the same kind of atmosphere about them; I was wondering how they evolved - you were spending a lot of time up at Mendocino...

G.C. I was gonna call your attention to Mendocino in that respect. When I first went to Mendocino in '68 after "Through The Morning, Through The Night" I found that there is something in that place - like there is in the Rocky Mountains or Big Sur; I even got it in Ireland just the other day. I was thinking to myself that I'd like to spend six months there, just to do some writing.

D.S. I spent six months in Scotland and that's what happened to me.

G.C. Right. There is something there that humbles you. The power of the ocean you feel (indicates) that big and your ego can't get too far in a circumstance like that. I've seen this happen with many people - occult gurus - that'n'that who come up there with their pretentiousness and end up just being deflated by the very area. It gave me that thing of being able to walk around, look at the ocean and feel very pure in reception of what I communicate, just communicating. Both of those albums came out of that and so did "Two Sides", which had other influences in it but still came from being able to sit there and look at the ocean out of my bedroom, totally silent, and hear the wind thrashing around.

D.S. The Eagles seem to be, superficially in my opinion, into Carlos Castaneda and Don Juan...

G.C. I will say one thing though, that the new record ("Hotel California") has indications that Glenn (Frey) is starting to get down to it with his writing. I've known Glenn for years and years and years and have always believed in him. Personally, I believe he's a really beautiful cat. He's starting to make statements, like in "Hotel California", abstractions of something that comes from the realisation of another place, almost a dream-sequence kind of thing.

D.S. I still feel it's a double-standard.

G.C. Possibly so - I wouldn't like to make a political statement.

D.S. It seems to be capitalising an ethic which is directly opposite, or rather apposite.

G.C. I don't know - I hear an underlying current which indicates that the whole philosophy he's living under makes it appear that way, but underneath saying, 'I really don't give a fuck'. That's what I get from it, but I've known him for quite some time so that possibly gives me an insight into what he's doing and eventually he may be making statements which are really...



(tails off) y'know. I'm really enjoying this, it's not very often...

D.S. We didn't want to talk about The Byrds.

G.C. You could get into that with this very statement. There were a lot of things that happened in The Byrds that definitely were related to the cosmos...

D.S. The sound itself...

G.C. The sound itself, the lyrics of many of the songs. The statement I could make is that as far as the Don Juan theory - removing yourself from being so material that you're hung up on it - I mean, I'm sitting in a fine hotel and can have room service...

D.S. But the basic truths still hold true. The basic thing is to cut down on internal dialogue.

G.C. From that point everything else seems to be just in order. I've gone through a thing many times with many people who have been close to me who are so hungry to have those luxuries that they never get 'em, or have them for a while and then they evade 'em.

D.S. The conclusion I've come to now, after a long, long time is that whether you're looking at Castaneda, or Zen, or the I-Ching, or the Tarot, a lot of the things they say; Castaneda for example, is a reworking of Zen, also a reworking of Buddhism, a number of other philosophies, but they all have the same basic truths inherent in them and they are all very simple.

G.C. I can tell you something that is a great summary in a humorous way. I've had a tenant for the last four years who is, and I have to say this right, a Professor, a lady who is a Professor of Philosophy. She teaches Philosophy and so forth, lives in a world of study... and humility, definitely does. One night, because all she talks about is philosophy, Zen, Buddhism, Eastern religions, occult theories, goes to seminars constantly, she's standing in the kitchen fixing some food

and talking this whole philosophical rap. I turned round and said to her, 'Nancy, philosophy is one big argument', and she replied, 'Oh no it isn't!'

Time to go? Surely not. There's been some misunderstanding...

But truly we had to chug down our beers and retrace our tracks in the plush-pile carpeting. 'Hey, you must give me your address?', Gene suddenly enquired; 'Do you ever get out to California? You must come and visit me.'

Taking my Fitzroy brand shorthand book, he wrote an address in skeletal, rounded script.

'Can I try one of your cigarettes?'

Yes, Gene. For sure, you can.

On Saturday, at Hammersmith, during the onstage three-way tieup demanded by circumstances, McGuinn (whose recent hobby consists of attempting to defenestrate trivia-fixated journalists) turned to Gene - 'Do you wanna be a rock'n'roll star?'

'No.', said Gene Clark with emphasis.

I've met quite a few rock'n'roll stars. I don't much like rock'n'roll stars. Gene is a genuinely nice man in a forest of phoneys, and I like him very much. I feel we have something in common.

Afterwards, completely forgetting to trap Thomas Jefferson Kaye in some backwater corner with a tape machine (he had actually volunteered, another goodhearted guy) there was a gathering of the clans.

Dippy and I, Prockter, Ralph, Fagence and the fair Julia walked to Hyde Park and sat under a tree in the rain. Seemed like a natural thing to do.

STEVE BURGESS