

Wil Forbis and the Gentlemen Scoundrels

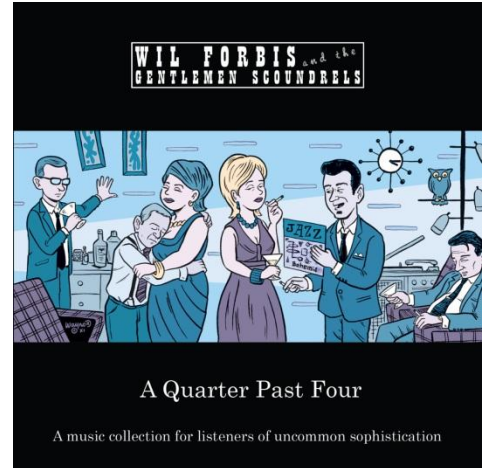
A Quarter Past Four

Song Commentary

By Wil Forbis

A Quarter Past Four

This song is an archetypical jazz blues. Peter Kavanaugh and I played as a guitar duo for a number of years and this tune was one of our showpieces. Back then we played it on two acoustic guitars; it had a Lonnie Johnson/Eddie Lang vibe. For the album, it was recorded with guitar, rhythm section and three horns and that updated the sound by a couple decades. I think it has a 1950s jazz club feel. It reminds me of a live album I have by a lesser-known jazz guitarist named George Barnes.



Love Locked in a Vault

The main influence on this song is pretty obvious: 1930s and 40s Broadway. That was probably the first kind of music I ever heard, thanks to my dad's record collection. He had soundtracks for shows like *The Pajama Game*, *The Boys from Syracuse*, *My Fair Lady* etc. You can say that kind of music is naïve, but it has an innocence that's very appealing to me from an escapist perspective. The lyrics to this song imply some kind of back story: a rich man pursuing a virtuous woman and not getting very far.

Speakeasy Blues

It's rare that I rewrite songs, but Speakeasy Blues actually existed as another song with a completely different set of lyrics. That version never sat well with me and it wasn't until I envisioned the narrative scenario of the current version -- a man visiting an underground speakeasy in the 30s -- that things really fell into place.

I've always felt that American culture pre-1940 (as viewed through modern eyes) doesn't get the credit it deserves for being cool and sexy. This tune tries to make the point that people went to bars back then for the same reasons they go to bars today. To get drunk and get laid.

Nightflowers

This song is one of the most harmonically sophisticated songs I've ever written, but it was also extremely easy to write. I was playing around with the harmonic minor scale and the whole thing poured out of me in about 30 minutes. The lyrics paint a picture of something akin to a children's fairy tale like Peter and the Wolf - animals eyeing each other in the forest, both thrilled and frightened by the adventure inherent in their day-to-day existence.

On Hold

Like *Nightflowers*, this is a tune that came from the edge of my abilities as a songwriter but was born quite easily. I was experimenting with John Coltrane's famous "Giant Steps" harmonic ideas and stumbled across a chord progression that kept modulating itself upward in half steps. It was very easy to write a melody on top of that.

For the solo section I had originally devised a fairly standard 12 bar chord progression for the musicians to play over. I recorded a ghost version of the song for the drums and bass to play along with while they were recording their tracks and, due to forgetfulness, in that version I cut out two bars. So the 12 bar solo section became a 10 bar. But, I liked it, so we kept it.

I'll Have the Blues until I Die

This song is much more rock or blues than jazz, but for that very reason I thought it should be included on a mostly jazz album; it gives the other material a chance to breathe. It was actually written around a pretty killer rock riff, but as time went on and the song evolved in the studio, we made the decision to cut the riff. It's one of those curious cases where the impetus for a song ends up not surviving the birth process.

A Quarter Past Four (Reprise)

Occasionally the band and I will start and end a set with different versions of *A Quarter Past Four*. It gives the feel of a TV variety show. What I like in this version is how the song ends, then comes back at you, finally ending on a dissonant horn squawk. Just to let people know we don't take ourselves too seriously.

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