

Artist Statement

I grew up in the Detroit area listening to a wide range of music that inspired me to play and compose on the guitar. I was blessed, my Mom worked for Westbound Records in the 60's and has this great collection of records that I grew up with - Jazz, folk, Soul and a lot of international music. My first true love was rock'n'roll ...hard rock. I really took to it. I loved it for its strength and angst. Then discovered those same elements in Flamenco. I couldn't believe it. A Spanish Gipsy named MANITAS DE PLATA delivered equally intense lyrics and aggressive behavior as my rock Gods. So I sought out other Flamenco artists and found CAMERON DE LA ISLA, PACO DE LUCIA and VICENTE AMIGO. Amazing! Then started to find other world music artists. NUSRAT FATEH ALI KHAN, with his explosive and acrobatic singing of qawwali music (Pakistan). I think I was shouting the loudest after seeing ZAKIR HUSSAIN at a concert hall with JOHN MCLAUGHLIN and SHAKTI (India). Their compositions and performances are masterful. When I hear RABIH ABOU KHALIL play the oud (lute) or DJIVAN GASPARYAN play duduk (wooden reeded flute) my spirit races back to my youth at the Armenian bazaars like a familiar scent. When BAABA MAAL sings in his native tongue from Senegal he somehow transcends the language barrier and I understand him. His record Baayo is one of my favorites out of West Africa. STEVIE WONDER's music from the 70s continues to thrill me over and over. Brazilian music is also a favorite; it too summons that same intensity. I swear my blood gets hot when JORGE BEN or CAETANO VELOSO pound out the Brazilian sambas. My introductory recording of Classical music is of guitarist SIEGFRIED BEHREND performing the "Concerto de Aranjuez" by RODRIGO with the Berliner Philharmoniker in 1939. The adagio walked me through every emotion I had ever felt. CHRIS THILE, Bluegrass artist, put out a record, "How to Grow A Woman From the Ground" that's virtuoso. Then there's Jazz and the way the musicians improvise in and out of chord changes with methodology yet, with feel. And there's something about the way JOHN COLTRANE or BILLIE HOLIDAY deliver a ballad with such movement. They always seem to be my favorite tracks, too...those ballads. Many times sad but they seem to have the most heart or what the Brazilians call suadade (sow-da-gee). I heard NICK CAVE describe suadade as "an inexplicable sense of longing, an unnamed and enigmatic yearning of the soul. ...and some artists like to bathe in it!" All these great musicians I mentioned, and so many more, influence me around one common thread (in

addition to their great talent): their ability to surrender and be seduced by a song! I believe this to be the secret ingredient to unleashing a musician's true potential. Whenever ARETHA FRANKLIN, JEFF BUCKLEY, RICKIE LEE JONES, BOB MARLEY, NINA SIMONE, ROBERT PLANT, etc., move from their softest singing voice to a scream with full lungs, you can hear that spirit heave from their lips. That's the element, that secret ingredient. It compels me to pay tribute to those artists for influencing and inspiring my own music - which makes them part of this record. IN TRANSIT is a collaboration of remarkable musicians with instrumentalists and vocalists that hail from West Africa, Brazil, Armenia, and the U.S. Their influence and great talent give these original compositions a new life, one that the guitar and my self could not deliver alone.

Sean Blackman