

THE SONGS OF

EDEN BRENT

JIGSAW HEART

1. BETTER THIS WAY I wrote “Better This Way” in the afternoon of a bright sunny day with the curtains wide open and a lot of sunlight shining in my piano room. Ironically, it’s the only song I’ve ever written that made me cry while I was writing it.

“Better This Way” is a country waltz, and the piano introduction reminds me of something that Floyd Cramer might play. Back in the 70’s the IRS auctioned some of Jerry Lee Lewis’s belongings to offset his outstanding tax debt, and my Daddy was highest bidder on his confiscated home stereo. So, I used to listen to Floyd Cramer’s “Last Date” on a record player that once to belonged to Jerry Lee Lewis! I was just a wide-eyed piano student, but I remember how magical it felt listening to Floyd on Jerry Lee’s stereo and wanting to grow up to be a great piano player just like both of them are.

2. EVERYBODY ALREADY KNOWS Secrets are hard to keep in a small town. Everybody knows everybody, and gossip is a favorite pastime. During a brief love affair years ago, I hid my affections publicly, yet after only a couple of clandestine weeks, my secret romance was the talk of the town. To save my reputation serious damage, good friend and local bluesman Lil’ Bill Wallace whispered into my ear, “Baby, you’re messing up.” ‘Baby you’re messing up’ was his way of telling me that I was being foolish, and he was right. My behavior was foolish, and I abruptly ended the affair. “Everybody Already Knows” is a lighthearted recollection of romance and rumor in a small town and is inspired by the keen wisdom of the late Lil’ Bill.

3. JIGSAW HEART Lots of songs mention broken hearts. My sister Bronwynne’s “Heartbreaker” asks the name of the game the heartbreaker plays, and my other sister Jessica’s “Broken Heart” asks “How many pieces does one broken heart make?” Counting all the pieces of a heart broken in sport was visual and memorable, and I borrowed that idea from both of them when I started writing “Jigsaw Heart.”

In my whole life, I’ve never completed a jigsaw puzzle because every time I tried, some of the pieces were lost or missing. I enjoyed poetically comparing pieces of a broken heart with pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. I particularly liked juxtaposing the two title words together, “heart” because it is emotional and “jigsaw” not only because it is intellectual but because it describes both the puzzle variety and the tool that cuts the whole into pieces. I liked the aural and visual collision of the two words, jigsaw and heart.

It took some trial and error to harmonize the initial 4-bar piano motif that recurs throughout the song. I’ve developed it more completely since the recording, and it will continue to develop as the song matures. The riff reminds me of the piano vamp in “South Africa,” but in “Jigsaw Heart” the texture of Dan Dugmore’s pedal steel hangs over the piano part in a beautiful but haunting way. Incidentally, Dan did some great playing on my sister Jessica’s album “Deerskin Jacket” about ten years ago. He sure gets around a lot. Or maybe it just runs in our family!

4. OPPORTUNITY Other than Joan Armatrading's original, the only recording I've got of "Opportunity" is a solo rendition by Bobby McFerrin. Both are terrific. The lyric delivers a powerful hard-luck story that plays like a movie in the mind, like reading a great short story can do. For this song, I recorded Wurlitzer piano with vibrato for the very first time ever, and it underscores the lyric with a slightly seedy, ghetto mood. Two of the McCrary Sisters, Ann and Regina sang groovy background vocals, and Regina played mean tambourine. I'm pleased with the way it turned out, especially after being a fan of the song for more than thirty years.

5. I WISH I KNEW HOW IT WOULD FEEL TO BE FREE The first time I heard composer Billy Taylor perform "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free" was at a Delta Blues Week concert in the early '90s. Boogaloo and I were the opening act. The song was an uplifting hit with the audience that night, and eventually led me to Nina Simone's melancholy recording. I hadn't planned to record it myself until we were a couple of days into tracking Jigsaw Heart. At one point during the session, I got too far inside my own head, second-guessing myself and my instincts, and walked outside to take a break. Wishing I could just let go and enjoy the studio session as much as I love playing for live audiences, I started saying to myself, "Why can't I be free? I wish I could be free." Then it came to me. "I wish I knew how it would feel to be free." The mere thought of the song made me smile, and so I decided to record it.

6. THE LAST TIME "The Last Time" recalls one of my last visits with friend and musician George Allen who died in a fatal car accident a few years ago. Although I recorded the song on piano, I actually wrote it on guitar without thinking about chord progressions or theory like I do when I'm writing at the piano. Writing on guitar is frustrating because of my limitations but liberating since I barely know what I'm doing. It frees the creative process to just make music without over-thinking it.

7. PANTHER BURN I recorded Jimmy Phillips's "Fried Chicken" for Mississippi Number One, and he also wrote "Panther Burn." Whether Jimmy is in town or not, his songs are always on the set list at Delta get-togethers (which invariably turn into living room jam sessions) because he writes about the Delta. Around here, everybody with a guitar knows how to play his songs, and everybody without a guitar knows all the words. So I've performed "Panther Burn" in living rooms and on stages for years. This was the warm-up song at the recording session, and it's such a great song, I decided to keep it. The groove is a straight-ahead rock beat, and Colin plays perhaps his best guitar solo of the whole album on this one.

8. LET'S GO AHEAD AND FALL IN LOVE During preparation for the recording, my sweetheart asked me if I had written a song for him yet. I hadn't so I answered "no," but his mild disappointment gave me the idea for "Let's Go Ahead And Fall In Love." It's a risqué blues with predictable melody and chord progression, and I borrowed classic blues double entendres that are the song's joy. On a live album Delta bluesman James Son Thomas introduces "Catfish Blues" by instructing the audience to "listen to the verses. Don't listen to the music. Listen at what I'm saying." With that in mind I had so much fun jotting down classic, sexy blues to consider referencing in the song. By the end I had coined a few new "classics" myself like "bring a little spackling, you can fill my hole!"

9. TENDIN' TO A BROKEN HEART For *Ain't Got No Troubles* I recorded “Beyond My Broken Dreams,” a song co-written by my Mississippi friend Tommy Polk who is a prolific songwriter with all sorts of credits. He wrote “Tendin’ To A Broken Heart” with Nashville songstress Joanna Cotten and the keyboardist Johnny Neel whom I’ve met a few times before. (The first time I met Johnny was with Boogaloo in Clarksdale.) I wanted to record one of Tommy’s tunes on this album, and I chose this one because it fit the “jigsaw heart” theme of the album, and it’s beautifully crafted. It’s easy to identify a song written by professional writers because you can hear the craftsmanship in every single line.

10. LOCOMOTIVE Daddy went to hear Johnny Cash in 1956 when “Folsom Prison Blues” was a hit on the radio. Arriving early to the show, Daddy walked up to a fellow and said, “Hey, man. I heard Johnny Cash was going to play here tonight.” That fellow looked straight at Daddy and said, “That’s me.” Immediately Daddy requested his favorite “Folsom Prison Blues.” Johnny Cash dedicated it to him during the show, and I’ve been singing it with Daddy ever since I can remember. “Locomotive” has the same country two-step rhythm with a strong backbeat. It’s the kind of song that’s a lot of fun to drive but hard to stop without a good plan, which is why we faded the ending. It’s like trying to stop a runaway freight train or a high-spirited, half-crazy woman who runs over you and keeps going.

11. GET THE HELL OUT OF DODGE Mike Powers at Yellow Dog Records introduced me to Toni Price singing “Get The Hell Out Of Dodge.” Writing about a romantic break-up as if it’s an old western shoot-out is wildly clever. What imagination! So long, partner. This town just ain’t big enough for the both of us. The comparison is hilarious, and the western imagery is perfect. Words like “showdown”, “ricochet”, “lonesome dove” and “swinging doors” all make this a delightful masterpiece, and a perfect moment of levity for the album.

12. VALENTINE When we recorded producer Colin Linden’s “Valentine,” (co-written with Tom Hambridge) Colin and I were standing next to each other in the studio with only a microphone between us, very intimate and totally exposed. I can’t remember if we did one take or two, but the performance was so honest that when we finished, I was crying. The lyrics are simple and Colin chose a delicate arrangement of only guitar, bass, string section and voice. This treatment allows the beauty of the song to reveal itself rather than overshadowing the song with a grandiose frame.

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Publicity: Nick Loss-Eaton 718-541-1130 nick.losseaton@gmail.com

Radio: Brad Paul 617-413-7821 bradpaul56@gmail.com

Photos and Electronic press kit: www.yellowdogrecords.com/presskits/eden

Preview tracks: edenbrent.bandcamp.com/album/jigsaw-heart