

SYMPHONY OF SHADOWS: The Saga

A BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE BAND

The history of Bedemon is covered very thoroughly in the previous release, 2004's *Child of Darkness*, but to re-cap for those unfamiliar: Bedemon was never really a band in the traditional sense of the word. It was a name attached to a series of occasional recordings by Randy Palmer, a good friend of Pentagram members Bobby Liebling and myself. Randy, who would actually join Pentagram twice briefly during 1974, would have a few songs to record, and we'd meet at the Pentagram rehearsal warehouse and record them. That was it. No rehearsing, no gigs; it wasn't a real "band."

Jump ahead to 2001. Writer/musician Perry Grayson wanted to write a piece on Pentagram and Bedemon for Metal Maniacs magazine. Due to the 70s material being bootlegged and passed amongst fans of Pentagram, there actually was knowledge of Bedemon in the heavy metal/doom/stoner-rock community. Randy was floored by this, as were we all. We decided to get together and record an actual 'proper' album of all-new material, and during the latter half of 2001, we all began writing and swapping demos of possible songs. At the end of April 2002, Randy and bassist Mike Matthews (along with Randy's fiancée Taryn Dodd) flew out to California to my place in San Luis Obispo County and we laid down the backing tracks for what would eventually become the finished album you are listening to today. The story between those spring 2002 sessions and the eventual release in the fall of 2011 is a long one of excitement, hope, tragedy, delays, frustration, more delays, more tragedy, and finally, triumph. So settle in; if you've read my liner notes in the previous Bedemon release or Pentagram's *First Daze Here Too*, you know brevity isn't my forte.

THE RECORDING SESSION

We had heard each other's demos. Mine and Mike's were pretty complete, with vocals, drum machines etc. On the other hand, Randy's were — literally — one guitar track recorded onto a regular cassette. We really had NO idea how the songs would go. I didn't know the drum patterns. No one knew where the vocals or guitar solos would go, or for that matter, who would play them (more on that a bit later).

Additionally, even though my drum kit is set up in my garage, I literally had not played it in years, preferring to spend more time in the house playing guitar. I did finally clean it up, bought new drum heads and sat down to play a few times before they arrived, but I was not exactly in drum-shape. Mike as well was bass-challenged: *“After playing no bass for 25 years (I was strictly a lead guitarist after Bedemon) I bought a bass for these sessions and headed out with my mics, my Mackie board and my ADAT to Geof’s place to play and record the sessions. We had sent each other recordings of the songs but had done no work on them until we actually were there. The process was to have the author teach the songs to the other two and I wrote out all my parts. Then we rehearsed them in the living room until we got them tight, and immediately went down into Geof’s garage and recorded them. The first day, I rehearsed the first song on the bass, which was a huge mistake, my fingers were screaming with pain and I had to switch to guitar. Unfortunately for the rest of the time, my fingers were really hurting.”*

And that’s how it went over the six days we recorded these nine songs. What you’re hearing on these songs is as spontaneous as it could be, and whatever happened on those few takes of each song is what was going to be for eternity. Yes, looking back, there are a number of things we’d do differently, but given how well the songs turned out in this situation, I’m pretty amazed by what we achieved.

A note about the recording equipment: the sessions for the backing tracks were recorded on ADAT. For those unfamiliar, ADAT is an audio digital recording system that records eight tracks onto VHS tape. The guitar and bass were plugged in directly — we all wore headphones — while the drums were mic’d, although not sufficiently. We had mics on the bass drum, the snare/hi-hat, the main tom-tom and one overhead to pick up everything else. What we lacked was a mic on the floor toms over to my right. This created a nightmare for engineer Shawn Hafley years later when we got to mixing, as he had to boost the overhead track to bring the floor tom’s level equal to the snare and main tom while also blocking out the cymbals that were on the same track. He then had to go back and create a track with the cymbals so they were heard as well. It was a real headache, and in hindsight, we should have used a sub-mixer with more mics on the drums channelled into perhaps two to three tracks. Again, this is one of a zillion obstacles we overcame to arrive at the recording you hear now. If you heard the original unaltered backing tracks, you wouldn’t believe we got from point A to point B.

So, we used six of the eight available tracks, which left us two tracks for guitar overdubs and solos (the vocals would be added later in a studio where there would be additional tracks).

Ah, the solos.

Randy was not, as he readily would admit himself, a very good guitarist. He didn't even *own* a guitar or amp in 2001 and hadn't played guitar in over ten years. Fans, however, loved his playing, even comparing him to his idol, Tony Iommi of Black Sabbath. This would totally crack Randy up. So, when we began preparing for these recordings, Randy said he wanted Mike and I to play the solos. We argued against this to no avail. He felt we were the better players, and he wanted the songs to sound as good and professional as possible after the less-than-studio quality of the *Child of Darkness* recordings. The one exception is Randy's "D.E.D." on which Randy does indeed perform the solo, although it was a pre-written melodic line-style solo, not actually a solo in the traditional sense of the word.

The problem was, given Randy's bare-bones cassette demos he'd sent us having no vocals and no solos themselves, Mike and I had virtually NO idea not only where the solos would go, but for that matter, who would be playing them. So here's how the recording process would go for this album:

1. We'd record a track, usually in 2-3 takes max.
2. We'd listen back to it
3. Randy would then say, "*Okay, the solo starts . . . HERE, and then goes for four lines. Geof (or Mike), why don't you do this one?*"
4. The other two members would go upstairs, and the one playing the solo would sit alone in the garage with a foot control switch that would back the tape up to just before the start point of the solo so they could re-do it until they were happy with the solo they had just come up with.
5. When Mike or I were happy with what we'd played, we'd go get the other guys to come down and listen.

In other words, these solos couldn't be more spontaneous. Aside from my songs "Saviour" and "Hopeless" which I did additional work on in later years, the solos on all the other songs were done as much on the fly as could be. There was NO working anything out in advance. And so, in those six

days from April 25th through April 30th 2002, we recorded the backing tracks and most of the guitar solos.

BATTLING BEDEMONS

However, things didn't always go smoothly. One of my demos which I'd sent to Randy and Mike — and of which was totally approved to be recorded for the album — was a song called "Exterminator." It is a heavy, crunchy mid-tempo song with a primal beat on the floor toms and sinister-yet-catchy chord changes, unabashedly written in the style of *Stained Class/Killing Machine*-era Judas Priest.

We sat in my living room and after starting to teach it to Randy and Mike, Randy suddenly says, "*I don't really think this is a Bedemon song.*"

I replied, "*What?!! You've had the demo for over six months and were totally cool with it!*"

"Yeah," he continued, "*but it's too much like Priest. It's not really Bedemon.*"

I stood up with my guitar still on and stormed back to my bedroom, yelling something to the effect of, "*Fuck you! Now I have one less song on the album because you now suddenly change your mind about a song you've had six months to listen?!!*"

I slammed the bedroom door behind me.

Cooler heads eventually prevailed, but "Exterminator" was eliminated from the album and I had nothing else ready to offer up in its place. I hope to properly record it someday.

Mike: "*I think we were all expecting some drama to happen at the sessions. Randy could be notoriously moody and in the phone and e-mail discussions leading up to the sessions, we had already had many huge arguments about what songs we were going to do, etc. Mostly it was Geof and Randy; I was always the peacemaker so when the actual sessions happened where we were doing ten to twelve hour days of rehearsing and recording, I knew it was a matter of time.*"

We finally got to the point after about four straight days where we had a lot of basic tracks done and Randy was trying to record some guitar harmonies. I was listening through the headphones and in kind of a pissy mood because I was getting extremely tired of playing and engineering and couldn't hear what Randy was playing. I stopped the recorder and told Randy to start again, same problem, so I stopped it again. This happened several times and I finally stopped and said something like, "How the fuck can you hear what you are playing?"

Randy looked at me and completely went off, calling me a fucking asshole, telling me he couldn't stand me, he'd had enough of my shit and that he was leaving and was never going to speak with me again. He said he was going to erase all of my parts and have someone else do them. Taryn took him back to the motel and calmed him down and we resumed the next day after some weird apologies. I fully expected something like this to happen, but I expected it to be directed at Geof, not me!"

Randy's sometimes irrational wrath did indeed come out towards me at the end of June. I'd sent Mike a photo I'd taken of myself for the Bedemonwebsite, playing guitar and striking the classic 'anguished guitar player' pose of head cocked/eyes closed/mouth open and stretching a high note. Randy saw it on the site and went ballistic. "You're the drummer in Bedemon, not the fucking guitarist!" I shot back, "Randy, I play most of the solos on the album! We wanted you to play them but you insisted Mike and I play them!" He replied, "Well, I'm going to re-record all the solos on my songs. I don't need you and Mike. I can find some local musicians to work with . . ." and so on.

We did eventually calm down in days following, but this was unfortunately becoming a more frequent occurrence. The feeling is that his detoxing off the methadone he'd been on for close to twenty years was causing him both mental and physical agony, and these outbursts were a result of that. Despite all the good things going on in his life, reuniting with Taryn and planning to move back to Virginia to be with her, having just recorded this great album and so on, he was at times a very dark and depressed person and he was having medical issues which didn't help things. Despite being my best friend for over thirty years, I was having to increasingly walk on eggshells when dealing with him, not knowing what might set him off.

Having hastily recorded the final track “Hopeless” on April 30th, Mike, Randy and Taryn returned home May 1st. Mike took the tapes with him, and the next task loomed before us: who will do the vocals?

SINGER, SING ME A SONG

One question which reasonably will come up is: why isn’t original Bedemon/Pentagram vocalist Bobby Liebling on the album? The blunt and honest answer: ultimately, Randy decided against working with him. We debated this for quite a while. He was indeed the obvious choice, but Randy finally said he didn’t want to use Bobby for two reasons. First, he felt Bobby’s vocal style had changed. Having heard the 2001 Pentagram release *Sub-Basement*, Bobby seemed to have abandoned the classic 70s Ozzy/Iggy-isms for a more funky, almost James Brown-funk style, and Randy felt that wasn’t right for Bedemon. The other reason was more personal. Randy was genuinely afraid that if he traveled from North Carolina up to Virginia to spend time with Bobby as he recorded the vocals, he would be tempted to fall back into hard drugs. Randy had been on methadone for many, many years and had a number of slip-ups. With Taryn back in his life, he was really trying to get it together and was detoxing off methadone, but he knew his weakness, and didn’t want to test it. He was afraid being around Bobby would do just that.

So now what? We had backing tracks and no vocals.

Enter Shawn Hafley to the rescue.

Shawn was a fellow DJ with me at KOTR until the station changed hands in 1998 and then worked at what is still to this day a great local indie record shop called Boo Boo’s in San Luis Obispo. One day he told me about the manager at the other Boo Boo’s in Grover Beach and said he was a singer I should check out.

Craig Junghandel picks up the story: “*Geof contacted me one night via telephone and explained the situation to me. I was beside myself, seeing this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work with some seasoned players, in a style of music that I love. I sent O’Keefe a couple of CDs with my vocals on them, then we met shortly thereafter. He showed me the lyrics and explained a bit about what they were after in terms of a singer. I wanted the gig BAD. A week or so later, O’Keefe and I were in Shawn’s studio with me laying*

down some rough vocal tracks for the new Bedemon songs.”

He was amazing. I sent samples to Randy and Mike, and it was agreed: Craig Junghandel would be the vocalist on the 2002 Bedemon album.

AND THEN, TRAGEDY BEYOND COMPREHENSION

On July 31st 2002, I returned from a Lynyrd Skynyrd/Kansas concert at the California Mid-State Fair in Paso Robles, about ten miles from my home. There was a phone message from Taryn: “*Geof, we were in a bad accident and Randy’s in the hospital.*”

It was midnight my time but I called her despite it being 3AM eastern time and she told me what had happened: they went out to buy her son a car and were later driving to celebrate over dinner when they were broadsided at an intersection by a teenager driving with a bunch of friends who ran a red light. Randy, sitting in the front passenger seat — where Taryn was originally going to sit — took the brunt of the impact.

He was in the hospital for eight days, most of it in a medically-induced coma. I was talking to Taryn multiple times a day; on August 8th, I called for an update. Her mom answered and said Taryn had just walked in the door. She got on the phone: “*Geof. . . Randy’s dead.*”

And thus began a year of intense grieving on a personal level that I won’t detail here . . . except to say Taryn and I will forever be bonded as friends since 1973 and now due to the most tragic of circumstances. Ten years later, we rarely have a phone call where his name doesn’t come up.

SO, NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Mike and I agreed right away that this project would absolutely be finished. My e-mail to him dated 8/9/2002, the day after Randy’s passing:

Mike,

Sitting here numb . . . I see his photo and I burst into tears. What a fucking tragedy. I just can't believe I won't even hear him laugh at my stupid horror movie jokes again.

I called Craig and told him the news and said that you and I are determined we will absolutely finish this album in Randy's memory and that he will sing the songs.

What a fucking nightmare. This is so sad...

Geof

...and his reply the same day:

I hear you my friend. I am in shock as well. It is very hard to look at my email, so many of them are from you and Randy. I'm glad I saved them, but it is unbelievable that we will not be getting any more. I will work on the website a bit later today; I don't think I can do it right now.

Talk to you soon,

Mike

We needed time to heal. Craig was definitely on board, although saddened that he would never get to meet — or even speak to — Randy.

When we began to discuss resuming work on this, Mike and I got into a rather heated and contentious debate: should we add guitars to Randy's tracks to make them fuller and more produced? I felt that, knowing Randy's love of Sabbath, he'd want heavy, thick layers of guitars. Mike felt that the tracks should be left as Randy last heard them, and that post-production mixing could make up for any lack of overdubbing. Neither one of us wanted to budge on this issue, and we asked Taryn for her opinion. She suggested doing two versions, and while that would be nice conceptually, time and money-wise it wasn't feasible. Finally, we came to a compromise: I could add all the stuff I wanted only to my two songs, "Saviour" and "Hopeless," but the other seven songs would remain as is. Mike was genuinely paranoid about sending me the master tapes for Craig's vocals to be recorded, fearing I would overdub guitars onto Randy's songs. I didn't.

Shawn said he could double Randy's original guitar tracks, change the tones on the doubled tracks and make it sound like multiple guitars. That did the trick.

BEDEMON ON HOLD AS LIFE GOES ON AND IN SOME CASES ... DOESN'T

Things in all of our lives kept Bedemon on the back burner for many years. Shortly after Randy's death, my father began showing signs of dementia, requiring his moving closer to me and my devoting much time to him. He passed away in May 2004 at age 100. Much of Craig's time was taken up with a band he'd joined, and he also got married. Then Pentagram guitarist Vincent McAllister, who had planned to temporarily move in with me to work on new music and possibly add a solo to one of my songs on the Bedemon album died of cancer in 2006. Shortly thereafter, Craig's mom died, also of cancer. Mike and his wife were in the stages of planning a move from Arizona to Montana where they were building a home from scratch.

Eventually, after this prolonged period of highest of highs and lowest of lows, we focused on resuming the Bedemon sessions.

FINISHING WHAT WE STARTED BUT ... THERE'S A PROBLEM

Craig: "In 2007, O'Keefe and I charged forward with the new material. Only problem was, I was again involved with another band, plus my wife was about to have a baby. I had a full plate at the time, but Geof and I knew we had to release the doom. The vocal sessions began in the second half of 2007, finishing up in late 2009. The bulk of the vocals were done in 2008, but recording continued into 2009, as we just couldn't leave well enough alone."

One major issue we had to face was that, with Randy's demos having no vocal guide tracks, we had virtually no real idea what melodies he would have wanted, nor were we exactly sure even where the lyrics would go in his songs. What we had were: instrumental tracks and his written lyrics.

Obviously, the three songs written by Mike or myself weren't an issue, but Randy's five compositions and the one co-write ("Son of Darkness") were. As I began to work with Craig, I had to first essentially finish writing Randy's songs. Everything from the main verse melodies to the choruses, the background vocals . . . we had nothing to go on; it all had to be created from scratch. In the case of three long songs ("Lord of Desolation," "D.E.D." and "Eternally Unhuman"), there were lengthy end sections of music with nothing happening; no solos Randy had asked for, no lyrics that would appear to belong there, nothing. As per my agreement with Mike, adding a new guitar solo to any of Randy's tracks would be out of the question, but doing something vocally — since it wouldn't be affecting Randy's original guitar parts — would be okay. And so, in addition to having to write the melodies for the core parts of the songs, I had to figure out some creative vocal "thing" to do in these extended fade-out end sections.

There were more times than I can count where I would be making the forty-mile trip to the studio, listening in my car to the one song we were going to work on that night and arranging it in my head so as to be able to convey to Shawn and Craig the concept I was imagining. A lot of times, things I'd envisioned just didn't work, and we would literally re-write a new part right there and then, as we were about to record another vocal take. It was a tremendous challenge but it was also creatively exhilarating to take this lump of doomy coal and try our best to form it into an exquisite diamond of demonic beauty.

After the vocals were done, most of 2009 was spent taking the whole thing and mixing it. And remixing it. And mixing it again. We would basically mix one track, and then I would take it home and listen to it over and over in different settings, i.e. the car, on a large living room stereo and a desktop mini-stereo to see if it held up in the 'sounds-good-on-everything' test. I would also inevitably hear a bad guitar note, too-low drum levels, bass guitar that needed more low-end etc. etc. etc. and come back the following session with my to-be-fixed list. Because many of these songs are long and have numerous parts, and parts within parts, multiple sessions would be spent fixing one song. And then, I would send them off to Craig and Mike to get their opinions and at times they would want something changed. It was a LOT of work, especially for Shawn, but in the end, I know we have an album we are proud of.

No one will ever know exactly what Randy wanted these finished songs to sound like. I can only state that, knowing him and his musical tastes as well as I did, I tried my best to present his material in a finished form that he would nod his head in time to and break into that great smile. With Mike's and Craig's musical contributions and — this can't be emphasized enough — Shawn's amazing studio knowledge, problem-solving and patience, I think we did a pretty amazing job, especially considering what we started with and the challenges we faced — musical, technical, emotional — at literally every step of the way; the phrase 'labor of love' couldn't be more aptly applied.

Somewhere I hope Randy is proud ... and nodding his head and smiling.

Geof O'Keefe

[note: These liner notes were originally completed 7/31/2011, nine years to the day of Randy's accident. Due to numerous delays in getting the project finalized, the notes were updated March 14, 2012.]