

MadMan3



Nothing “Insane” Here But the Music

by Ricka McNaughton
theinsufficientskeptic.com 11-7-16

Fred Wilber, keyboardist (above left); Phillip Bruce Carr, Jr., drums (center) and the musician professionally known as Jofus (right), on Chapman stick and voice, make up the musically divergent electronica band MadMan3. Recently, Fred and Phil casually shared a few personal insights into their longtime musical collaboration. (Unfortunately, Jofus was unable to join this particular conversation. He is no less a vital part of the music-making.)

Locals may primarily connect Fred and Phil to their former “Ken Sleeps Naked” bandmate days, and Phil to “Viperhouse,” “Right Time,” and “Anachronist.” Also the “Re-Bops” (music for kids and their grownups), back in the day.

No dance band with a name like *MadMan3* ever began life with a whimper. But even in the full-throttled raptures of musical expression, this band’s skillful musicianship is far from unhinged. Their songs draw from a life-time cache of solid musical theory and insights. They make an ever-evolving use of thoughtful structure, using patches of order to bracket stretches of jammy fluidity. There is a healthy executive give and take. As the best bandmates do, in writing songs and arrangements, they happily seek out the far corners of each other’s fertile musical minds. An example?

PHIL: Recently Fred wrote a song – it had a kind of reggae feel to it. (*MadMan3 started off years ago as a kind of loosely conceived dub-reggae act.*) But the (*electronic*) drums he put with it were much more of a hip-hop arrangement. So I added something that goes back to early 60’s-70’s Jamaican music. And it worked perfectly. And it was such good counterpoint. I felt...oh yeah, this just flies.

FRED: Was that “Don’t Let go?”

PHIL: Yeah.

Was there an element of surprise in this fortuitous fix?

FRED: With Phil it’s *never* a surprise. What Phil brings to this process is always the right thing to bring to it. And that’s why I love playing with this man.

PHIL: That's one of the really fun things for me too....in *MadMan3*, I feel that I get the opportunity to entirely write my own book.

Musically, the band bounds around a core of electronic dance music (EDM) with elements of fixed composition and trancy flights of fancy. With EDM, the beat seems so much the signature thrust of the sound, you'd think it would magnify the creative influence of the percussionist. How does a drummer, in that context, think about the drumming?

PHIL: I really listen. And in fact I try not to overthink it. The only question is, what would I add to the vitality (of the piece)?

FRED: I'll often introduce Phil as the heartbeat of *MadMan3*.

It bears noting that drumming is perhaps the most ancient and primal form of musical expression, used variously in sacred and healing ceremonies, to heat the blood for dance, war or procreation, to summon the ears of gods and ancestors, to engender states of hypnotic ecstasy or, in some cases, to quiet the chattering mind. Not for nothing does the human heart give us a beat to live by. And it craves accompaniment. Science reports that if you place two living human heart cells together in a lab dish, they will soon pulse to a shared rhythm. Who's to say if any of this explains the appeal of EDM, or the primal fun of being *MadMan3*.

What Jofus brings is also something pretty extraordinary. He fret-taps the chordal Chapman stick, a 10-stringed polyphonic hybrid guitar and bass combo that can produce bass lines, melody, chords and textures simultaneously. Such is his multi-tasking virtuosity that he probably could tap out a pizza delivery order on a smartphone at the same time. Phil and Fred are agreed: If you Google videos of people playing the Chapman stick, you won't see anyone playing it close to the way Jofus does.

FRED: I think of *MadMan3* as a very collaborative effort – I probably write the bulk of the songs...Phil brings what he brings, and Jofus brings what he brings...and I come with a melody idea and a chordal structure. If we're working the sequencing I'll come with a tempo idea. But Phil is completely creating what happens with the percussion.

Is it common for a good drummer to play very differently-styled music with very different bands?

PHIL: I think it's relatively common these days. It didn't used to be. I remember a lot of guys who played jazz...they didn't understand the backbeat. Do you know what I mean when I say a backbeat?

Well, what does *Phil* mean by it?

PHIL: I wouldn't say that different genres of music have their own backbeat.... There's just something you recognize as a dance beat....it's something in the 4/4 timing...there's a low pitch and there's a high pitch. I may play a 16th note before the 2, and you feel the 2 rather than me playing

it. And then I may really accent the 4. And sometimes that's not played but it's implied. There's a space there.

FRED: The anticipation of the beat.

PHIL: "Yes. All the Chuck Berry songs...like he says "if it's got a backbeat you can't lose it..." It's that dance beat you could feel in a lot of rhythm and blues in this country. And I think that influenced the world.

Does Phil think of himself as a dancer?

PHIL: Not really. No. (Maybe just around the house.) But the main reason I play drums is because people dance. And I feel like I'm dancing when I'm playing.

It so happens that both Phil and Fred possess a philosophical backbeat to their understanding of the importance of musical expression to the human spirit. Or at least the importance of pursuing your musical bliss. Fred, in fact, has an academic degree in philosophy in his back pocket. Phil has quietly synched his life with aspects of Buddhism that call to him. Its ideals inspired him to do other things in life besides music. Both men have worked to pass on the gift of music and harmony to the next generation. Fred did a stint in New York teaching music video making to inner city schoolkids. Phil has generously mentored many a budding young musician in the Central Vermont area. These are of course much abbreviated bios.

MadMan3 has no published CD's. Their "label" is live performing, although they do tape their performances. Ever-avid explorers of the sonic landscape, they've been celebrated in the past for their epic jams.

FRED: We once played a song for what.... forty minutes?

PHIL: It's possible!

FRED: Well at least twenty. The new stuff is a little more down tempo...and it's not as dependent on what I call the hard pounding muscle motor beat. That dance beat is brought in at some point but then it gets more textural. With a pulse. This new song (*one that Fred is just wrapping up in preparation for a Flying Stage concert*) ...you're gonna see the same thing... there's a place in it that I think could become our dance floor anthem. But it starts out much differently. I'm anxious for Phil to hear this.

PHIL: Oh wow. I'm intrigued because you were saying you weren't even sure it was a *MadMan3* song.

FRED: I wasn't. It's definitely got a nice little pulse to it but it's not a pounder. It's a delicate thing and then suddenly it just morphs into this....*rager*."

Nothing about their music typifies them, age-wise, as the gray-haired artists they freely admit to being. Musically, the band has kept tempo with cultural shifts. Even today's high-schoolers are entranced with what they're playing. The good

musical times together continue to roll for them. But really, if they had to choose one in particular, what era would stand out as the best of those good times?

PHIL: Right now.

If money, reality, etc., played no part, if it were possible to order up a fantasy band to play with, any band, who would it be?

FRED: The band I'm in now. *MadMan3*.

PHIL: I feel the same way. I really do admire so many different players. But I don't know that I'd have quite the same chemistry.

In closing, what question about the band hasn't been asked that should be asked?

FRED: How do our wives put up with this?

The juncture of spirit and sound, for both of them, is a chosen devotion. Being in *MadMan3* is both lifting and grounding. If this be madness, then sanity has a lot of explaining to do. □

This article is part of a series written for The Flying Stage (Barre, VT) in appreciation of partnering artists and performers, and to share insights into their work.

* * *

*On Sat., Dec. 3: Flying Stage Productions and ReSource Barre (30 Granite St., Barre) present: a night of dance-trance music by **MadMan3**, warmed up by alt-rockers **Anachronist**, featuring selections from their newly released CD. Spotlighting drummer Phillip Bruce Carr, Jr. supplying the backbeat for **both bands**. (Photo at right: Phil with Flying Stage creator and president of Re-Bop Records, Diana Winn Levine.) Doors open for indoor BBQ at 7:30 pm. Music begins 8:00 pm.*



Tickets at the door or online at: https://anachronist_madman3.eventbrite.com. General admission \$10.00. Barre residents and youth age 18 and under: \$7.00 Families (3 or more): \$20.00. More info: diana@reboprecords.com