

ВЕРІСЕ



AMSTERDAM

VENICE AMSTERDAM

KIPP LEHNON, LEAD VOCALS
MARK LEHNON, LEAD VOCALS
MICHAEL LEHNON, PRODUCER, ACOUSTIC AND
ELECTRIC GUITARS, BASS, KEYBOARDS, VOCALS
PAT LEHNON, ACOUSTIC AND ELECTRIC GUITARS, VOCALS

"Venice is the best vocal group in America right now. They're better than anybody else I know. They're fantastic. I'm a student of harmony. That's my thing. I love all kinds of harmony. But I particularly love theirs, because it's so natural. It's not like anybody else's. Very unforced, very from their hearts. I've been telling people about them since the first night I heard them. I've told everybody I could find that they were the best. This is my favorite band in the world."

--DAVID CROSBY

"Venice, one of my favorite bands, is quintessentially Californian, with soaring harmonies. We've played together at numerous benefits and at each other's concerts. What they do is sing amazingly. There are two lead singers, there are four harmony parts a lot of the time, and what it most resembles is CSN, or sometimes Sly and the Family Stone. Well, anything unique is pretty hard to describe, but that's the general musical terrain. They sing and play their asses off, and I have seen them knock out many an unsuspecting crowd. On two separate occasions I booked them for large outdoor venues where we were doing benefits and they took the audiences, who had not come to see them, completely by surprise. It's such a pleasure to play with these guys, because they have that power."

--JACKSON BROWNE

In November of 2005, Venice began writing for their tenth studio album. This time, they had a very specific direction to guide their creative energies. They had recently signed with Universal Records, who had released their biggest selling album to date, "Two Metre Sessies," and the label loved the intimate mood of that album and the mellow side of the band that it represented. So they asked Venice to essentially come up with "Two Metre Sessies Part 2," only with new material this time (as that album had been a greatest hits set).

Because "Two Metre Sessies" is a collection of songs that Venice performed live during the taping of the television program of the same name, all of the tracks had been recorded with the whole band playing together at the same time. This created a feeling of immediacy and presence that both the band and the label agreed has been missing from Venice's previous albums. So it was decided that in order to maintain the "Two Metre Sessies" feel, this new studio album should be recorded the same way: Live.

Kipp Lennon explains the overall concept. “We wanted it to be spontaneous and loose and no overdubbing or fixing wherever possible. Mellow and moody, but also fun and energetic along the way.”

So the band began to collaborate. First during frequent writing trips to “Hideaway Hill” (their family home in Vista, California), and then later at each other’s houses in between family responsibilities.

For Michael Lennon, the knowledge that they would be recording this album live in the studio brought a freshness to the writing process. “In a sense,” he says, “the songs had to be great in their simplest form. We knew we couldn’t rely on fancy production to make them shine. They would have to survive with one guitar or one piano and vocals.”

Once the new batch of songs were developed enough to start playing, the rehearsal process began. Every song had to be as finished and tight as possible by the time they got into the studio, so rehearsing for the recording sessions was very similar to the process of rehearsing for a tour.

Explains Michael, “This rehearsal process really enriched the songs. Having musicians that you really respect to bounce ideas off of is invaluable. Even if someone’s idea doesn’t work, it often triggers another idea that does.”

In the first week of May, 2006, two weeks prior to the scheduled recording start date, Venice began an 11th hour cram session. Dutch keyboardist Nick Bult flew to California, where he, the four Lennons, bassist Mark Harris and drummer Jamie Wollam spent an intensive week at Michael’s guest cottage fine-tuning the new songs together as a band. It was long days and hard work, but Mark Lennon also remembers the fun. “We laughed, ate, drank and worked out all the arrangements together in a relaxed atmosphere,” he says.

After Nick returned home, the band continued to massage the songs right up until stepping onto the Holland-bound plane one week later. Then on May 18th, recording for the album began. Their studio was de Singelkerk, an old wooden church in Amsterdam.

Why a church instead of a traditional recording studio? Michael explains, “The room itself has a beautiful natural reverb that, when controlled, is amazing sounding. Also, the old wooden construction, the wood plank floors and the leaded glass windows gave it a very warm feel.”

Mark recalls the atmosphere. “Three stories high, it had a great acoustic sound that we took advantage of. They had a reception/kitchen/office area where we made our tea and checked our e-mails. There was another room we used for our huge group lunches and dinners where we rarely talked about the recordings and just took a real break and laughed at each other’s funny stories and stupid jokes.”

The band’s original idea had been to record the music and the vocals at the same time, but due to technical limitations, they were only able to do that with three songs, “Ashes in the Snow,” which is on the main album, and “We’re Okay” and “Katrina,” which are on the bonus CDs. For everything else, they were forced to change their game plan. They wound up recording all of the music first, with the band set up on two-foot-high stages, in a circle, facing each other. Kipp and Mark stood outside in the hallway singing reference

vocals into microphones that could only be heard in the musicians' headsets. Individual mics were placed in front of each instrument, and then ambient mics were set up around the room to capture the blended sound of the band as they played together.

Once all the music was laid to tape, the instruments were cleared from the room, and it was time to record the vocals. New stages were built, six feet high this time, and they were again arranged in a circle, facing each other. Once again, ambient mics were set up around the room, to augment the signals from each vocalist's large vocal mics. According to Michael, "The lead vocalist would sing his part at the same time we would sing the background parts. The pressure was on not to screw up the other guy's take, but it felt so good to sing together in one room at one time!"

Because the band was so well prepared, they wound up cutting 18 tracks in only 10 days. No small accomplishment considering they had to keep tearing down their entire setup to allow for regular church functions. But Michael believes that working so quickly really made the music come to life. "It's not always ideal to make a record in this short amount of time," he explains, "but I think that's when people really deliver. In the end, it keeps a raw, imperfect vibe that adds energy to the final project. Time restraints keep you from over-thinking and over tweaking things. You're forced to rely on your gut instead of all the little voices in your head that are telling you 'Maybe this' or 'Maybe that.' "

"It felt like we were making an album in the 60's or 70's," Kipp adds, "when you just dove in and cranked out an album. We were lucky that we didn't have enough time to get too picky about anything, spending hours overdubbing to make it 'perfect,' which can end up sounding sterile and lifeless. We also have noticed throughout the years that all of our favorite albums by other artists -- huge, historic influential artists -- have lots of little imperfections in pitch and performance, but it was the overall vibe that grabbed the audience. The song. The energy. So we strove to not beat up our performances too much. We would say 'Rock and roll...' and move on. It was liberating in a way."

Michael continues, "Although at times it was a bit stressful and uncomfortable, the experience of playing together as a band was awesome. When five musicians are laying down a track and you make a mistake on your part that ruins the other guy's greatest take, that's the down side. However, when someone plays a new part that wasn't in the take before and that triggers another guy to play a new part and suddenly we're in uncharted territory, that's exciting. It doesn't always work, but the journey is amazing and most of the time it lifts the track to a whole new level. There's something great that comes out of musicians when they are put in that 'do or die' situation that cannot exist when they know that you can just push stop, rewind a bit, and punch in again before their mistake."

One of the highlights of these sessions was the day (May 23, to be exact) when they were accompanied by ten string players on the songs "Too Late for Me Now" and "Ashes in the Snow," plus the bonus CD's "We're Okay." When the string musicians arrived, many were surprised to learn that they would be performing live with Venice, because their typical process is to play to a pre-recorded track.

Michael remembers, "Although it was our dream to have live strings on the album, I was a bit apprehensive when the day came to record those three songs. But the moment they started running through the arrangements, I looked over at Pat and he had tears in

his eyes, as did I. It's one thing to hear strings on a record, but to stand in front of ten live players who are playing a song that Kipp and I wrote was one of the highlights of my career."

Adds Mark, "The string section brought an elegance, a richness and a unique feeling that only a live orchestra can bring. It's funny, but every time we've had any kind of orchestration with any recordings or concerts we've done, we all end up crying and hugging each other with tears of joy, because not only are we lucky to have them there, but the chords and notes they end up playing on our stuff always seem to be exactly what we would have written. Everything reminds us of our favorite movies that had similar soundtracks that made us cry and shaped a lot of who we are musically today."

The band decided to name the new album after the city they'd recorded it in, "Amsterdam." Kipp explains, "Michael said he liked the idea of calling it 'Venice in Amsterdam' because it was cool sounding. You know, the two city names. And because we were recording it there and we have spent so much time in Amsterdam over the last seven years, in some ways it is like our other home town. Then we thought that title might confuse some people because it sounds like a live album, so we just shortened it to 'Amsterdam,' which we all loved. It's also cool because the Beach Boys once recorded an album in the Netherlands called 'Holland.'"

The title holds a special meaning for Mark. "To me, Amsterdam is a European mirror of our city of Venice, California, in a lot of ways. Artistic, free, and a melting pot of all cultures and lifestyles. Kind of like our music!"

Kipp agrees. "There is a certain vibe that is particular to that city that we all love. Beyond the obvious cliché image people have of Amsterdam as a legalized pot zone and red light districts, there is a beautiful, vibrant, old city with a proud history and culture. Artistic, historic, mellow and alive. Modern and traditional. Similar to Venice beach, but they've got us beat by about 500 years or so."

The band flew back home to America at the end of May, but in the following few weeks, in between local California Venice gigs, Michael returned to Holland twice to oversee the album's mixing. The final result is a new collection of songs that is near and dear to the band's heart.

"When I listen to this album" says Mark, "it feels like I'm seeing a private, live show in a great sounding room."

"To me," he summarizes, "There is no one way or only right way to do an album. You just try different things and celebrate that time in your recording career. Have fun while doing it, and look forward to surprising yourself on the next recording venture."

TRACK BY TRACK

"WEIGHT HAS BEEN LIFTED" (LEAD VOCAL: KIPP)

Kipp: "This is a very cathartic song for me personally. It's about some personal stuff I've gone through since the last album. I'm glad people are reacting so strongly to it. It's a little odd arrangement-wise and that's part of what we like about it. Starting with a chorus, half the verse being sung by the background vocals. Michael's solo is burning as well. Can't wait to open shows with it!"

"REWIND" (LEAD VOCAL: MARK)

Mark: "This is a song I just had to write, about having a major fallout with my best friend. We were always together and more like brothers than anything else. Without going into detail, I hope someday he can see the truth in what happened and we can resume where we left off."

Michael: "I wrote the bridge on this one in my hotel room in Amsterdam the day before the tracking session. I felt it needed a release in order to really pay off by the end."

Kipp: "Cool song. Ambrosia meets Toni Braxton meets Venice."

"TOO LATE FOR ME NOW" (LEAD VOCAL: KIPP)

Michael: "Kipp's original idea when he showed it to me was to make it more of a grooving song like 'Taxman' or 'Most of Us.' I felt that in order to deliver a melody and topic that simple and familiar, the track should have a twist to it. For some reason I came up with this Bolero, Mexican kind of approach to the track which worked instantly."

Kipp: "It was a nice opportunity to work with Tony Asher who is an old family friend. He co-wrote 'God Only Knows' and 'Wouldn't It Be Nice?' with Brian Wilson. It's actually a song about how hopeless you can feel when you have children and love them so much that it hurts."

"JOEY" (LEAD VOCAL: MARK)

Kipp: "I was listening to my car radio one day while we were picking songs for this album and 'Joey' by Concrete Blonde came on. It was always one of my favorites and I knew that Mark had absolutely loved that band and song. I mentioned it to the fellas and they loved the idea. We mellowed it out to fit the vibe of this album and make it different from the original. It's got a nice feeling to it."

Michael: "We tried a more electric guitar approach, but with the plan in place to make a more acoustic, organic record, I made up a Bruce Hornsby style riff on the piano that we all liked, and we built the track around that."

"RADIO GAME" (LEAD VOCAL: KIPP)

Kipp: "A fun way for us to vent some of our frustrations about the downside of trying to get a hit song. Kind of going for a Van Morrison meets Bob Dylan thing. Great initial groove from Mark Harris."

Mark: "All true, and we have the scars and bruises to prove it!"

"NOT ENOUGH FOR YOU" (LEAD VOCAL: KIPP)

Michael: "Inspired by a progression that Pat brought to us from an old Peter, Paul and Mary song. We added to the music, and then after being stuck on what the melody and words should be about, Kipp came up with an idea that almost wrote itself. Another personal favorite of mine."

"BITTERSWEET LIFE" (LEAD VOCAL: MARK)

Mark: "This song was a collaboration between a couple of Dutch singer/songwriters and ourselves. They had written it especially for us. The words they had written were great, but very hard for us to totally grasp as being our own. So we re-wrote the song about how I saw my mother after my father had passed. My parents were so in love and she missed him so much, but she knew she had thirteen children, thirty-nine grandchildren and ten great grandchildren to live for. Her heart gave us two more years, and then she died on the same exact day he died, but two years apart. Their love was and is an inspiration for us all to try and find and follow."

Michael: "The lyric 'The song that leaves me weak' is relating to one of her favorite songs, 'Have You Ever Loved a Woman' by Bryan Adams, from the movie 'Don Juan Demarco.' "

"ASHES IN THE SNOW" (LEAD VOCAL: ALL)

Kipp: "An old family favorite from Seals and Crofts' little heard first album. That album was a big part of our childhood. Our older brothers used to perform this song at weddings and concerts in the 70's. Originally, we were entertaining the idea of a whole album of cover tunes and this was one of the first considerations. We eventually started writing so many new tunes that we scrapped the cover album idea, but this one stayed because we love it so much. Singing it with that string section, in that church, made us really think about our family and the many years of memories with that song."

Michael: "We recorded this all live. Guitar, four vocals and ten string players all at the same time. Now that's Rock and Roll!"

"LIFE IS LIKE A MOVIE" (LEAD VOCAL: KIPP)

Michael: "I always wanted to write a Little Feat type of song. The band jammed the groove at a Vista writing trip and Kipp had the idea for the lyrics."

Kipp: "A lot of tumultuous, improbable things have happened to us over the years (good and bad), in our family and in our band, and I'm always going around saying it's like a movie. So I put it in words."

"THE LOST WEEKEND" (LEAD VOCAL: KIPP)

Kipp: "My wife and I have known each other for over twenty years. This is about how we got back together after having been apart for a few years. "

Michael: "It reminds me of 'That's the Way It Is' from our 'Born and Raised' album. Very Venice."

"THE ROMANCE THAT NEVER WAS" (LEAD VOCAL: MARK)

Mark: "This is a song I wrote with our friend and sometimes keyboardist Chris Horvath. It's about being so close and yet so far from the one who could be 'The One.' It's about good intentions, but circumstances never working out the way they should, and true love being just around the corner."

"ЖЕПНУ" (LEAD VOCAL: KIPP)

Kipp: "A song Michael and I wrote in 1984 about the first time I really fell in love. The only thing I could compare my rush of feelings to was the feelings I had for music. How music affected my life and emotions. We've always loved this song and played it occasionally over the years, but never actually recorded it. The words are a bit naive or young-sounding in places, but it is very honest and innocent. Kind of captures a time in your life that never comes again."

Mark: "It brings a sweet innocent vibe to this album which has so much dark and light."

"ONE MORE SONG" (LEAD VOCAL: ALL)

Kipp: "We tried to capture some of the feelings we have during a raucous encore at a Venice show. The communal, high energy buzz that makes us all feel so lucky and alive."

Mark: "It's a kind of thank you to the fans for hanging with us and spreading the word."

BOONUS CD SONGS

"EASY TO BE HARD" (LEAD VOCAL: MARK)

Mark: "This song is from the soundtrack to the controversial Boadway hit "Hair." It was recorded by 3 Dog Night and I've always loved it. It's still very timely and has great lyrics, melody and harmonies."

"WE'RE OKAY" (LEAD VOCAL: MICHAEL)

Michael: "During one of my pre-production trips to Holland, I was approached to co-write with a prominent Dutch songwriter, Han Kooreneef. He has written some very successful songs for Marco Borsato and others. While sharing some stories and background information with each other, we discovered we had something very much in common. Both of us were lucky to have two children each, but sadly no parents around to share them with. He started playing some beautiful chords on the piano and I started singing melodies about the unfortunate situation we were both in: We both loved our parents, who are gone, and we love and cherish our children who are here, but the two will never meet in this lifetime. As I started singing ideas, I began to tear up. I knew we had a beautiful song about a sad situation. I left back for the states soon after that and on the plane I cried my eyes out and wrote all the lyrics before I landed in LA. In the end, the message of the song is, 'This is really sad for all involved, but in the end we're okay, don't worry about us.'"

Kipp: "So sweet and heartfelt. This is straight from Michael's heart. He's so good at those simple ways of stating honest feelings that could be trite or sound too vulnerable, but he does it in a way that just sounds real. Just like his vocal. The first time he showed Mark and I the idea for the song, we were in tears. We all loved our parents so much."

"KATRINA" (LEAD VOCAL: MARK)

Mark: "After the loss of our niece Katrina, I woke up and had this song fully finished in my head. I had dreamed the melody and words and only had to sit up, grab a pen and paper, and an hour later it was finished. I really felt like this song wrote itself. I recorded it the very next day, in time for Katrina's family and friends to hear it at her memorial. It was very lush, with harmonies, instruments and lots of production. Then I sang the song live last year during my solo tour in Holland, with only my vocal and Nick Bult on piano. Michael, Kipp and Pat came to one of the shows and heard the song in a totally different way. They said, "That needs to be on our next album, just like that: Real and vulnerable."

"O BAHIA" (LEAD VOCAL: MARK)

Mark: "This is a song from a 1976 film soundtrack LP that I heard in 1980 at my friend Susea's house. She made me a cassette that day and I listened to it religiously until I learned it phonetically. My Dutch friend Sylvia heard me sing it a capella at one of my parties and videotaped it. She found a 45 single of it on the web and shipped it to me. I sang it on my solo tour, and when the rest of the band heard it, they agreed that we needed something like that on our next album. I knew what some of the lyrics meant, with my limited Spanish from High School, but I didn't learn its full meaning until my good friend Jeff brought over his Brazilian girlfriend and we laid out in my backyard by my pool and she translated the whole thing to me."

Kipp: "I absolutely LOVE this song! The way Mark sings the Portuguese lyric, the very Brazilian melody. Beautiful. I could hear it a million times."