

BACK TRACKS ...

by Bruce Jeansonne

Recording: Fate of Nations

Artist: Robert Plant

Drummer: Pete Thompson

YEAR: 1993



Classic Drummer: You've known Robert Plant since the '70s. How did you get the call for these sessions?

Pete Thompson: I got the call from Phil Johnstone, Robert Plant's keyboardist, to come on board, it was a nice surprise! They had been looking for me for a while. Robbie Blunt, who was the guitar player in Silverhead, one of my old bands, referred me. They had already recorded tracks using a few drummers, Tico Torres, Chris Blackwell, and Michael Lee. By the time I came on board the album was way into production. Robert and I already had some working knowledge of each other, we would hang out together in Los Angeles in the '70s and had the same publicist in BP FALLON. When I was called for the sessions, Robert didn't realize who I was. Once we started working on the album, I had to remind him of the past, which was cool because he said some very nice things about me!

CD: How did the recording go?

PT: The first day's recording was a complete shamble as we had an engineer in from another studio and didn't know his way around the board at Townhouse Studios, the recording studio. The drum sound was not to anyone's liking and we scrapped and went to R.A.K. Studio, which had a good feel and ambiance with little drum spillage to it. This is apparent by the drum sound, which I feel we captured with its openness and huge imageary.

CD: "Calling To You" is a standout on the record. How did you approach the recording of it?

PT: "Calling To You" is one of the biggest sounding songs on the record. It was set out in stages. It was not a straight forward song as it was in 6's and the vocals were in 4's, with pushes and accented notes in odd places in the song. When we were working on the song, I suggested a real blues guitar riff for the rhythm of the track. I sang the rhythm, which Robert liked, and they went for it... that's what ended up on the finished track. It was fun to record the track knowing the orchestra with ethnic percussion of all sorts was being placed over the top.

CD: How much of the record did you record?

PT: I recorded eight songs, four of which ended up on the album. "Calling To You", "Great Spirit", "The Greatest Gift", and "Come Into My Life". "Come Into My Life" was another interesting recording. It was recorded hitting the inside of the bass drum with a mallet to create the boomy sound, playing my thighs as a repetitive sixteenth hi-hat effect, which was looped. I then overdubbed the drums when the band came into the chorus.

CD: What was your recording set-up?

PT: The drum kit I used on the album was a Pearl, 10,12,14,16,22, and deep snare as you can hear on the track "Calling To You". It's a monster crack, all brass and beef, just what we went for. The ambient mikes picked up a lot of the room, almost delaying it too much. Effective as hell though!!

CD: How long were you in the studio for, and what are your thoughts on recording with one of the classic rock artists of our time?

PT: I spent about a week doing tracks. We went into Studio 2 to rehearse more songs, but time got the better of the schedule and we left it there.

My best memories of the recordings was of Robert on my drums, myself on vocals doing a very dodgy James Brown improv' and jamming along to soul tunes... ah, those moments you should tape!

The entire project was recorded onto 24 track analog tape, all live players, including Nigel Kennedy on the violin solo at the end of "Calling To You".

Looking back, it was nice to be presented gold and silver albums and cds from around the world in appreciation for my work. Everyone was real friendly and it was a pleasure to work with all involved.

More on Pete Thompson: www.myspace.com/trapsboxone