

Political Rock IV

While I was re-working the Political Rock III album (reducing the number of songs from 15 to 12, and completely rewriting vocals and lyrics for half of the songs), I began work on a fourth Political Rock album by composing and recording on a small hand-held recorder short melodies and melodic fragments. With the exception of the last song on the album (“From The Stockade”, recorded in 1974), the vocal melodies for the songs on the Political Rock IV album were fashioned by combining two or sometimes three of these melodic ideas. More importantly, for the Political Rock IV album, the vocal melodies were composed first, then the guitar accompaniments, then the lyrics, which marked a departure from my usual songwriting method of writing the guitar music first, then the vocal melody, then the lyrics. I took great care with the lyrics for Political Rock IV, because of my grave concern about the prospect of a second term of the Trump presidency, and because of my determination to do anything and everything in my power to try to prevent that from happening.

This album is musically unique in several respects among the many albums of original music I have written and recorded. The first and last songs differ from the other ten in that they both have solo vocals and solo guitar accompaniments, and they both are played in alternate tunings. The first song (“Warring Parties”) is played on 6-string in d11 tuning (e-a-d-g-c-f), and the last song (“From The Stockade”) is played on 12-string in open G tuning (D-G-D-G-B-D) with a capo at the fourth fret. “From The Stockade”, from my very first album (The Apprentice), was a last minute substitution for another solo 12-string song I decided against including on the album owing to my dissatisfaction with how it turned out. “From The Stockade”, written in 1970 and one of the first songs I ever wrote, thus became the last song on the fourth Political Rock album, making for an interesting full-circle counterpoint to “CYH

Talking Blues”, also written in 1970, and the first song on the first Political Rock album. Incidentally, “CYH Talking Blues” is an abbreviation for the full title, which is “The Cut Your Hair Short So You Look Handsome Again Talking Blues”. The song was named after a memorable comment made to me by a sorority friend in college who was admonishing me for dropping out of Greek life and growing my hair out (among various and sundry other acts of rebellion).

The second through eleventh songs on Political Rock IV are all 6-string/12-string duets. For each of these songs the 12-string was tuned a half-step lower (Eb STD tuning, which is a sensible alternative to STD tuning for a 12-string guitar because it puts less stress on the neck and top), and played in common keys of play on the guitar. As a result the actual keys sounded for these ten songs are all flat keys, a significant departure from my usual custom, since the great majority of my original songs are in sharp keys. The 6-string duet arrangements, all played in standard tuning in common keys of play, were brought into agreement with the actual key sounded by using a capo (at the first fret seven times, and at the second, third, and fourth frets once each). All but one of the ten 6-string duet arrangements are played in Fingerstyle (5) or Fingerpick style (4), the sole exception being “Turn Them Out”, which is played in Flatpick style. Eight of the ten 12-string duet arrangements are played in Flatpick style, with the other two played in Pick and Strum style (“Big Dreams”) and Fingerstyle (“True Intentions”). The fretting requirements for the 22 guitar arrangements on the entire album (the ten duets plus the first and last songs) are modest in one sense, in that only 5 require more than seven chords, but challenging in another sense, in that half of them (11) call for the use of barre chords. The vocal schemes for the second through eleventh songs are as follows: lead vocal with 3-part harmony on three songs, lead vocal with 4-part harmony on six songs, and lead vocal with 5-part harmony on one song.