

Natural Healing Express Weekly

Column Volume 78 Vitamin M, The Healing Power of Music, Part V: Legendary Singer Benny Mardones

This week we will feature another fantastic songwriter and entertainer Benny Mardones. Benny Mardones exploded onto the music scene in 1980 and was quickly nicknamed "The Voice," a title earned because of his incredible range, as well as his soulful and passionate performance of "Into The Night." Into the Night became a radio classic across the country, topped the charts twice, and became one of the most frequently played tunes in radio history. It is estimated that the song has been played more than 5,000,000 times in the US alone, solidifying its place in history as one of the 25 most played songs.

Susan: Benny, you know I consider you a brother, having spent so much time together in Playa Del Rey, California. How is life at the beach community I miss so much?

Benny: Playa is still a sweet little town, everyone here misses you and says hello.

Susan: Benny- Your number one hit song, INTO THE NIGHT, is one of the top ten most played songs of all times. How does it feel to have written a song that connects with so many people over the decades?

Benny: It's an unbelievable feeling. I am so blessed. I never get tired of hearing it, I never get tired of singing it and I feel lucky to have written a song that will outlive me.

Susan: You are the only guy I know who has hit NUMBER ONE with the same song TWICE. How does that feel and how did that come about?

Benny: The second time turned Into the Night into a classic. It is among the 25 most played songs on American Radio. I sure would have liked to have had more hits, but I have left a footprint in the sand and I feel very blessed.

Susan: What led to your career in the music industry?

Benny: As a little boy, our family; my mom, sister and I lived beneath the poverty level. On our 16 inch black and white TV my Mom showed me Elvis on the Ed Sullivan Show. I said to her, "Mom, does he make a lot of money?" and she said, "Baby, Elvis has a \$100,000 mansion in Memphis." And I told her, "then, that's what I am going to be and I will pay your bills." Mom said, "Oh God." She never stopped wondering about my career in the music industry. One day I told her, "Mom, I have sold 6 million records and paid off your house." She looked straight at me and said, "That's good because you don't really have anything to fall back on."

Susan: That's Hilarious. So did you come from a family with a strong tie to music?

Benny: Mom played a lot of opera and told me the stories behind the opera. I grew up with the love of music; all music, and I knew it was my destiny. My intent was to break the chain of poverty and I was fortunate to be able to do that.

Susan: When and how did you get your big break?

Benny: In 1970 I was a staff writer for CBS. In 1973, we went to Woodstock, which was a fresh place to write. Everyone from Bob Dylan to Janis Joplin wrote there, a little place called Joyous Lake. Joyous Lake is a famous Woodstock club and the owner was Ron Marions. One night when I went in, Aretha Franklin's jazz/funk band called "Stuff" which consisted of legendary Cornell Dupree on lead guitar, Gordon Edwards on bass guitar, the late Richard Tee on keyboards and Bernard Dupree on drums was playing. Ron said, "You get up there and sing a song, they ain't ever heard a white boy sing like you." I went to oblige, when I got on stage, Richard asked me what song and I said I can do Stand By Me. Then he asked, "In what key?" Well, hell I didn't know what I was doing, so I said, "any key will do." He just laughed and started to play. When I finished, the crowd went nuts. When I went to leave, he grabbed me and said, "Young man, why don't you do another one?" So, I did Summertime and they loved it.

Little did I know Richie Havens was in the audience and he come up and said, "How long will it take you to learn 6 songs and the keyboard? I said, I don't know, maybe a couple of months? Richie said, "You got two weeks." So I learned the chords, ABCDEF, A Minor and E Minor. And I added It Takes A Lot to Laugh, but It Takes a Train to Cry by Dylan to my set. Two weeks later I was on my way to Hawaii with Richie Havens opening up in front of 7,000 people. Any 3rd grade piano teacher in the world would have taken one look at me and known I had no idea what I was doing on the keyboard. So I just started to sing and my voice took care of the rest.

While on tour with Richie, we were in NYC and somehow I caught the attention of legendary promoter Ron Delsener. Soon after meeting Ron, I was sitting in my apartment in Spanish Harlem when Ron called and said, "Blue Oyster Cult has cancelled as the opening act for Peter Frampton and Dave Mason tomorrow night at Madison Square Garden, would you like to fill in? Of course, I was too stupid to be afraid. About a half hour later, I called Ron back and asked if I could have a couple hundred bucks to buy a new suit. He told me years later, he would have paid me at least 5,000.00, but instead he sent a Rolls Royce to pick me up.

So that night at Madison Square Garden, with 23,000 people in the audience, I walked up the stairs to go on stage, took one look and ran back down screaming, I am NOT ready! I only know five chords! The Garden is where I saw Elvis and the Rolling Stones, I can't go on! Then I ran into the bathroom. About three minutes later, Richie Havens kicks open the bathroom door and says, "It Time!" I was more scared of Richie than the 23,000 people in the audience so I took the stage.

I started with Oh Me Oh My (if you would like to see this performance, go to youtube and type in Benny Mardones, Oh Me Oh My) The crowd gave me a standing ovation. I did a couple more songs and was well received. So I stood up and shared a poem I wrote, and then closed with a Bob Dylan song. It was one of the most incredible moments of my life. As soon as I got backstage, the two promoters grabbed me and said, "Don't you know that no one reads poetry at a Rock n Roll show?" I just shook my head, then one of them piped up, "and son, if you ever start a band, call them valium because we sucked down six each during your 25 minutes."

After that, two gentlemen walked up to me and said, "Could we have a minute?" And there stood Andrew Loog Oldham (legendary producer of the first 17 Rolling Stones records) and Larry Utall, President of Private Stock Records. They told me they would like to meet and two weeks later I was signed and in the studio cutting my first album, Thank God for Girls.

Susan: Wow, what a whirlwind. Let's change gears a second. Having been to your sold out Christmas Shows in Syracuse, New York, I have seen tears in the eyes of many of your fans when you sing their favorite song. As an entertainer, please share some of your experiences in utilizing music to heal/help someone:

Benny: I made a connection in Syracuse in 1980 when Into the Night was climbing the charts. The people of New York know I am there for them. If I sing a song, it's because I have lived it. I am sincere and humble when I say I am still here making music because of them. I love Syracuse. One night on the plane back to New York, I met the mother of a 9 year old little girl. Her daughter was a skier whose leg had recently been amputated. At the next show at Weedsport Speedway, we gathered the parking concessions - about \$12,000 and I said to her mother, "Go get her the best prosthetic leg you can find." 7 years later, a beautiful 16 year old girl walked on stage at my show at Syracuse with a gold medal around her neck. She had a sign saying, "you're right, dreams do come true." She had just won the gold medal in downhill skiing at the Special Olympics in Denver. I lost it.

We should all be trying to help each other. I am in music to touch people's hearts, to touch their lives and to make a difference. Music to me is a mutual love affair. I thank God for it every day. But I am not stupid; I see the clock on the wall.

Next week, we'll go on to Part Two of Benny's Interview where we will discuss the healing effect that music has had on Benny's life. I have said this for years, to me, Benny is one of the two top entertainers I have ever seen perform. He has been entertaining since the minute I met him, sharing many laughs and tears. Next week we will discuss his diagnosis with Parkinson's disease.

In the meantime, please look up his music at www.bennymardones.com or download from iTunes

Enjoy! Hope to see you soon and as always, please contact us via one of the following methods. Natural Healing Express: Phone 815 990 8732, email: skscham@aol.com 204 W Main St, Lena, IL 61048.

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Column Volume 79 Vitamin M, The Healing Power of Music, Part VI: Legendary Singer Benny Mardones, (cont.)

Last week, we began a very interesting interview with legendary singer and songwriter, Benny Mardones. (www.bennymardones.com) For those of you who didn't catch Part I, please go to www.naturalhealingexpress.com then click Newsletters and load Article number 78, Vitamin M, the Healing Power of Music, Part V Benny Mardones I. This week we'll continue the interview with Benny.

Susan: Benny, I know you were a very good friend another great, Mr. Roy Orbison. What was it like to walk on stage at his Tribute and sing the Ballad, "Running Scared?" for your friend? Barbara Orbison said it was one of her best healing moments. You knocked it out of the park!

Benny: It was one of the highlights of my life. Roy and I became friends, mostly because his kids loved my song Into The Night. Barbara (Roy's wife) called to ask if I would like to be Roy's guest in NYC. I went to his show. After, I asked if he would like to come to my apartment in Spanish Harlem to write with me. One day he knocked at my door and said "let's write". My legs went out from beneath me. I told him when I was a little boy I would hide under the blankets with my transistor radio and wait for his songs to play so I could go to sleep. I told him the only way it could be any better is if he had Elvis' band backing him up. He laughed. We became best friends and he taught me a lot about music.

When he died, it was like a part of my soul died with him. Ten years go by and here's Barbara calling to ask if I would take part in the Roy Orbison Tribute concert at Universal Amphitheater. She asked if I would sing "Running Scared" because she thought I could deliver the song. I told her I would be happy to do it, but I did not want to see her before the show because I would lose it. When I got to my hotel, there was a note, "Dear Benny, Thank you for being a part of Roy's life. I hope you like your band. Roy would have wanted it this way." When I got to sound check, there stood Elvis' band, TCB. Barbara had flown them in based on the conversation Roy and I shared so many years ago. There were no words to describe how I felt. When James Burton (lead guitar) asked me what key I would like to sing it in, I said I have always been fond of Roy's key. Ron Tutt (drums) and Jerry Scheff (bass) had huge smiles. Burton said, "You got it, Benny."

That night we were introduced by Bernie Taupin (writer of many Elton John songs) and he said, "Here's a guy who used to listen to Roy on his transistor radio under his blankets, give it up for Benny Mardones". There were three standing ovations that night; KD Lang, Bob Dylan and me. I could feel Roy's presence. Life, at the end, comes down to a matter of moments. That one was top of my list. It was a magic night, truly blessed by the angels. (YouTube: Benny Mardones, Running Scared, it will knock your socks off).

Susan: Benny- I still get choked up when I hear the song you wrote called "I Need a Miracle", can you share any personal experiences where music has been utilized to help heal you?

Benny: There was a time in my life that I had felt forgotten; and these lyrics took shape, "it's lonely at the bottom, it's lonely at the top. It's lonely when you're fighting; it's lonely when you stop." The

music industry can do that to you. You either succeed or die. You either win or die. If you are a kid coming up and you have something to fall back on, you'll die in the music industry. You have to have that kind of commitment, feeling like its life or death, that kind of passion or you just won't make it.

Susan: As a songwriter, you have written several songs that have a strong personal effect on people, what does it feel like to write something that helps a person relate to their own experiences in life, especially their love life?

Benny: I feel like the messenger. It's what I live for. Songwriters write songs, composers let the song write them. We all go through life sharing experiences even if we don't know each other. A song that can take you back to a moment in time, those will last.

Susan: What song(s) do you consider to have had the most profound personal effect on your life?

Benny: Into The Night, most definitely. It's like my first born. It changed my life, paid off my mother's house and it still pays my bills 40 years later. I also love Crying by Roy Orbison. My song I Might Be a Bird is powerful. It has been played at 12 military funerals. Remember, I sent that for your mom.

Susan: Yes. I do Benny. Everyone was in tears; the song reminded me so much of her. Thank you again for that (tears). So, if you could choose one thing that people will remember about your career, what would it be?

Benny: That I was there for people who needed me. I never took people for granted. I was in the music business to make music because music breaks all barriers; and music saved my life.

Susan: What does it feel like when you are on stage and you witness the crowd reacting to your songs, especially the ones you have written from the heart?

Benny: It's an unexplainable rush. Like being under a dome where you can look out and watch miracles. The only time I am 100% happy is when I am singing. It's the reason I was born.

Susan: Benny, I was there in LA when you received the devastating personal news of your diagnosis of Parkinson's disease. We cried and then played music to lessen the shock. How has your ability to create music been therapeutic during the ups and downs of Parkinson's?

Benny: You know how hard it's been. There have been nights where I have had a gun to my head and prayed to God to give me the strength to pull the trigger. My body is betraying me. I would feel so unwell and then I would hear a song. The song would give me hope, gave me light and I realized music is the light at the end of the tunnel. Music has brought me back several times. It heals.

Susan: Is there a place where folks could donate to research of Parkinson's or your personal charity?

Benny: Yes, Parkinson's Research, c/o Benny Mardones, PO BOX 5901, Playa Del Rey, California 90296. If anyone sends a check, please include a phone number. I like to call to thank people.

Susan: Also, do you remember us all being together on the night of 9/11 in that Chinese restaurant? You said something so profound I have never forgotten it. "The only people who hate America are the ones that have never been here and the ones that have never left." It seemed to help us begin the healing process and put everything into perspective. Please tell us about your most patriotic song and why you believe so strongly in patriotism?

Benny: Oh, I remember. It was devastating, but we are a strong country. I have carried the American flag as a backdrop since my days with Dick Clark on American Bandstand, long before Springsteen. I have said it before and I will say it again, The United States of America is and always will be the greatest country on earth.

My song, Stand Up and Be Counted was a Vietnam Anthem. I am a veteran myself, so I have been there for the rallies and speeches. Our soldiers are treated better by our countrymen now, but the fact that veterans come home today with no homes or jobs is a national disgrace.

Susan: I know you did a video tribute on the tenth anniversary of 9/11 called United We Stand. What did that feel like and how can fans see it?

Benny: It's called Brotherhood of Man, our version of United We Stand. My son Michael edited the video. It was a tribute to how far we have come since that dark day 10 years before. (YouTube United We Stand by Benny Mardones) It was my patriotic duty to do that song.

Susan: You already know that my favorite song in the entire world is written and performed by you. "Unfinished Symphony" is simply a masterpiece. It's on your Journey Through Time album (iTunes) Please indulge me and share a little bit about your inspiration for the song?

Benny: You know I was alone for 5 years, not long after the diagnosis. It was a very painful time. Unfinished Symphony is really an autobiography. It's about my pursuit of a dream that has not yet been fulfilled. I feel I have more hit songs that will chart someday.

Susan: Is there anything you would like to share with our readers and your fans here in Northwest Illinois/Southern Wisconsin/Eastern Iowa?

Benny: This summer we are putting out a new album. If the radio stations play it, I can come do a show there. And Thank You, thank you for loving Into The Night. It's kept a roof over my head.

Susan: How can we keep up with your tour and announcements?

Benny: www.bennymardones.com or Benny Mardones on Facebook. I am old school, I don't tweet.

Susan: How can we purchase your music?

Benny: iTunes or Amazon.com, records stores. I have 13 albums and 244 songs.

Susan: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Benny: Thank you so much, I love you, you are my sister. We've been through the good, the bad and the ugly. Through it all we stayed together. Please tell everyone back there I am alive and kicking and will be sitting down at the piano late at night writing them a song.

Enjoy! Hope to see you soon and as always, please contact us via one of the following methods. Natural Healing Express: Phone 815 990 8732, email: skscham@aol.com 204 W Main St, Lena, IL 61048.

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