

## Mp3 Peggy Van Zalm - Light Diamond



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Enlivening, provocative, entrancing...contemporary, atmospheric folk and soul to carry you along through the tears and the smiles. 12 MP3 Songs FOLK: Modern Folk, WORLD: Australian Details: On her new solo album Light Diamond, singer/songwriter Peggy Van Zalm continues to write some of the most affecting moving music around. The former lead singer of the late 80s Perth outfit Marthas Vineyard, Van Zalms solo career has yielded five albums of thoughtful and meditative folk. With a voice that suggests the tenderness of Joni Mitchell or the sly finesse of Chrissy Hynde, Van Zalms work is always rich in wisdom and heart. LIGHT DIAMOND was recorded in the small village of Elands, located on the mid-north coast of New South Wales where Van Zalm has found herself collaborating with local musicians and using these collaborations to inform her own songwriting process. From the gentle pop tug of Mercy to the spare and rousing Rise, Light Diamond is a rare and special album, filled with a wealth of warmth and melody. On her way to the Netherlands, where she is to base herself for up to 12 months, Van Zalm sat down with Alex Green of Caught In The Carousel ([caughtinthecarousel.com](http://caughtinthecarousel.com)) and discussed the making of the album, life in Elands, and the state of Australian music. See full interview BELOW

Caught In The Carousel: How was the approach to recording Light Diamond different from the way you've recorded in the past? Peggy Van Zalm: It's been a gradual kind of development. Hopefully, you feel too that its the next logical and artistic stage after Different World. The move to Elands was particularly important for us. The spirit of the community and the beauty and purity of the natural environment nurtured the music and the project. In addition Geoff and I had been playing quite a few gigs together as a duo and then we started collaborating with Helen and Peter and I feel we really developed a unique kind of synergy. The thread though throughout Light Diamond has been the vibe that's created with percussion and guitar. A lot of the beds are the two of us getting the liveness and energy happening, then

we've invited some of the key players in to do their thing. Helen Knight on bass, Peter Mullany on electric guitar and Hugh Cowley on violin--we had some wonderful moments playing with them live over the last couple of years. I was really keen to capture the material after evolving some of the songs in the live setting, rather than it be another session type of recording. However, it wasn't until we upgraded our computer and software that the enthusiasm really peaked, mainly because everything started sounding so much more polished; it was the impetus we needed to pull it all together. CITC: Can you describe what life in Elands is like? PVZ: As far as white settlement is concerned, Elands was mainly a little rural mill town and farming area up until the late sixties I believe, when an influx of young alternate-minded Sydneysiders all decided to move in. They brought with them a passion for the natural environment and broadminded and experimental attitudes. The town has a history of successful activism and still retains a broad-based progressive and creative outlook. There is also a peaceful acceptance of the difference of individuals and it is still very much a party town. People enjoy gatherings and celebrate with enthusiasm; good food and community spirit is something I've grown to truly value. Often the gatherings end up as musical opportunities. The population has an unusually high number of musicians, artists, dancers and writers within it. I have found we as a family have been heartily embraced and encouraged in all our non-conventional interests. We have found musical and spiritual soulmates within this small (around 500) plateau population. Our kids have enjoyed a unique experience in the extended family- like environment in the local school with a total of 23 children. I have also grown through my involvement with the local health centre, practising thought field therapy and another energy healing technique called quantum touch. Living on the rainforested plateau is both challenging and uplifting...the remoteness fosters a necessary psychological self sufficiency and also encourages grassroots self sufficiency too, as it is an hour away from any shopping centre with twenty minutes of winding gravel roads along escarpment. So, Geoff has been developing his organic food growing skills. The local food co-op still operates after 30 years, there is a general store and post office, two halls, a new cafe, a biodynamic yoghurt farm and factory, an aikido dojo. There is a degree of "filtering" out of the general population who are less willing to tackle the rough roads and distance. Personally I feel like I have thrived in the "wildness" of the place. We are in a little old millhouse that doesn't keep out the weather. I have learned to love the frosts and the brilliant blue skies of many winter days. One of the main tourist attractions is the Ellensborough Falls, which is 160m vertical drop. It is a powerful landmark and provides a definitive pulse and backdrop to this

community. I have been lucky to have the Ellensborough River as part of my backyard. We can hear the rapids from our verandah and we submerge ourselves in the refreshing waters in the height of the summer. CITC: How has this environment informed your songwriting? PVZ: Perhaps I first became aware of how the environment informs my songwriting and thus my life, some years ago when I was living in the Blue Mountains and escaping the clutches of big city living. It was for inner peace and healing that I escaped--an attempt to rediscover my true self and motivations out of a commercially hungry industry. In the years following, I made some trips to the red centre of the Australian desert and later across the eastern coast of Australia on tour, and now being for an extended time in this potent place, these environments have spurred more conscious depth of connection and recognition of how vital that connection is for me and it has brought me a respect for indigenous values with regard to spirit of place. It is with the same spirit that I try to make myself available for the music and for the lyrics and I enjoy drawing from the landscapes both inner and outer mirrorings. Recent songs like Listening In, Mercy and Distant Hearts were like a trilogy of songs written in a short period of time and I feel they came to address and assist in resolving certain issues in my life. I believe we all need to make time to be in the natural environment as much as possible. It is a balancing act and I believe it has a balancing action upon us. Something I have become aware of through practising natural healing techniques is exactly that every single one of us is absolutely able to affect positively the health of ourselves and the environment through our intent and desire. I feel the music moves with a similar pathway through me and through the resonance of both intention and desire. CITC: Keeping the commercially hungry industry in mind, did there come a point where you were disgusted, or fed up with the material demands of the music industry? PVZ: I was completely unprepared for the demands that came with a commercial agenda. Looking back, I believe I was both assisted by my wide-eyed innocence and also it became the reason I had to dip out at that time--to take a breath or two and find out my true direction again. I feel I was completely absorbed by the commercial agenda and had no sense of centre at the time to be able to just take time out, so I just bailed completely. Sometimes I wish I had more sense then, but of course it is impossible to go back and I know there is a bigger agenda and the path continues CITC: And has the journey you've ended up taking, both artistically and personally been a conscious movement towards the organic for you? PVZ: Not initially. It has been a re-direction and a gradual one. Now I see in hindsight why it occurred as it did and I can use it all. Teaming up with a visual multi-media artist like Geoff has really helped, too. Initially I

savoured the difference in our mediums and now of course we are traveling together and have merged projects and it is rather peculiar in some ways, but that has definitely been an organic process and we augment each others abilities. CITC: And in terms of your artistic process, was this something that was beginning to rear its head in the early days of Martha's Vineyard, or did it take you completely by surprise? PVZ: It has been a wonderful unfolding. I can see how it is so completely the same journey for me, but different aspects of the artistic process and the revealing of spirit. And, for that matter, coming to know our place within nature CITC: Light Diamond is such a lovely album not only because the songs are so wonderful, but because they all seem to have an intuition--a second sense, if you will--that has allowed them to be born out of a kind of listening to nature that goes beyond the running of a river or the rustling of trees. Songs like "Distant Hearts" or "Listening In" appear to be examples of this. But it seems this species of listening can't be achieved by taking a weekend and backpacking in the woods--and it's beyond simply communing with the natural world--it seems to come from an almost meditative understanding that allows us to listen to the world and respond to it as well. Am I way off? PVZ: I am really moved that you have this kind of response to the music on Light Diamond and I would most definitely advocate meditation as a passage for anyone who may be considering it. I feel there is a wealth of information available to us if we are willing and ready to listen. It is our empowerment base. The song "Listening In" is a lot about that--I believe very much that inner direction is the way through in these times when misinformation in the mainstream media is rampant. I like to think of life as a balancing act. "Being in the world but not of it" is a quote I love and try to live, and the running rivers and luminescent dawns are great energisers and also do communicate...its just a different "wavelength" or language, perhaps, and we can each "tune in" to nature the healer and teacher. And in that receptive state positive change may occur--possibly even on that backpacking trip CITC: Do you find that your musical influences that you had when you first got into music are still influencing you? PVZ: Not literally. I have been learning a lot more from playing with others--jamming and improvising when I get the chance. I used to really avoid it, 'cos I didnt feel very capable, being self-taught and not a particularly technical kind of player. But now I try to push myself through the barriers and its helped me a lot; its when the music is really alive, and then its gone, but something of the experience fuels the next song or performance and it is very rich. CITC: Any new bands/singers that you've come across that have dazzled you? PVZ: I have been watching quite a few vintage concert videos and docos lately. The surprise one for me that really knocked me out

was Johnny Cash. I found his performances and the footage of his everyday manner and persona simply compelling. It goes beyond ego and is a much larger presence. I love to see musicians and performers who can really allow themselves to be inside the music in such a potent and powerful place and is literally awesome and so beautiful. It is when the spirit of the artist shines through and the genre seems incidental. Good music has its own power and agenda then. I can feel that place sometimes when I am performing and I know it is the best I can be for an audience; its being inside the emotion of the song and getting out of that self-conscious mode of "performer". It is a kind of transcendence and its a very special and privileged thing then to be a musician where an audience can be there with you. I have had times when I have literally felt that shift from feeling awkward and things not working with an audience to just setting that intention to really feeling the song and then, like magic, the audience has sensed that and everyone is there together on that musical wave. CITC: What do you make of the current state of Australian music? PVZ: I think its still true to say that there is a wealth of interesting music out there, particularly in the independent scene that is generally not reaching mainstream audiences due to a number of reasons. One, being radio is not getting the cross feed from music television as it was with Countdown in the 80's, so a lot of local music never really gets out there. Radio is still pumping out "the classics" from that era and a lot of current new music worthy of airplay stays on the fringes a lot of the time. I have been impressed with numerous artists I have met on the live circuits when I tour. CITC: Was the sequencing of the album tricky? Did you want to follow a linear path in terms of themes and movements? PVZ: I spent a lot of time with the song order and we started with a group of 15 songs and at first I wanted to include them all, but it was just too huge. In the end we kept just the 12 and then it was easier to sequence them and it came together a lot easier as a totality. I wanted to have a movement through the album lyrically, which reflected a positive direction and outcome. Mood-wise I was also looking to bring a feeling of consolidation...fuel for the next stretch. I do feel that we live in amazing and challenging times as individuals and as a species on this planet. I also feel the responsibility of making a contribution with the work, which will nourish and hopefully uplift fellow travelers. CITC: Do you feel a different sense of responsibility when you write a song now that you have children? I always wonder how the lads in Slayer are going to feel when their kids are 12 and want to listen to their dads' music.... PVZ: I write primarily for myself and then I choose which songs I think could go further or if they stay just for me. Being the mother of two boys--well, just being a mother I believe has influenced the music, but the

responsibility I feel is to do with a sense of calling I suppose. It is bigger than me...I approach it sort of like I am the ambassador of the music and I am following the music trail and try to serve the music CITC: Your records always amaze me because they don't seem grounded in time--in other words, Light Diamond could have been made either fifty years ago, or fifty years from now. That's not easy to pull off, because certain production elements can immediately date an album. What's your feeling on this? PVZ: Production wise, its pretty simple I suppose--not a lot of effects that could immediately date the work. Also, lyrically maybe its the fact I dont make direct references to specific era things so perhaps I can see your point. I do feel this album is specific to these times however, or at least is referential to the needs of our times. My own particular experience with healing and nature is, I believe, a journey that we all are called to in our own ways and it is as much a call to spirit and for us to recognise and consciously make this connection. It is urgently needed that we wake up and grow up. It is the personal is political idea, that we all do make a difference to the planet. I don't peddle this so much as an overt idea because I believe the intention is inherent in the vibration of the music and resonance works of its own accord. However, I think that's why its important that new music be encouraged in place of the old classics which have had their time on the airwaves. CITC: What are your main goals for the future? PVZ: Right, goals for the future...it would be wonderful to be able to travel the world and play the music and keep expanding as an artist/musician and I guess that is what I am now starting to do. We are very much looking forward to being in Europe and playing and living. I feel so lucky. Sample of some live sounds of Peggy van Zalm's Blackberry Wine at: [myspace.com/peggyvanzalmsblackberrywine](http://myspace.com/peggyvanzalmsblackberrywine)

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