

# Mp3 Chris Opperman - Oppy Music, Vol. I: Purple, Crayon.



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In this first taste into the world of Oppy Music, we are formally (and not-so formally) introduced to some main characters and themes in Chris Opperman's sonic world. This 53-minute musical miracle was produced by ex-Zappa stunt guitarist Mike Keneally. 12 MP3 Songs ROCK: Progressive Rock, JAZZ: Jazz Fusion Details: Mike Keneally with Chris Opperman January 7, 1999 by Mike Keneally MK's involvement: Producer; lead guitar, synthesizer ("the Netherworld") and spoken word ("Marcelo Bi'Afro") on "Sophia's Dream (vs. Reality)"; electric piano and high keening background vocal on "Shipped To The Sky"; backing vocals and woodblocks from 5:35-5:38 on "The 22nd Overture"; spoken word ("Humphrey Boogart") on "Snot Woman: Act I, Scene 4"; spoken word and lead vocal ("Taco Bell Employee of the Month") and James Brown impersonations on "Ain't Got No Beef"; synthesizer ("Hell Noises") and partygoer on "Send Your Money." Comments: This album is one of the most important things I was involved with in 1998 - involved with EVER, actually. It happened in Boston at the end of April, at a time when I just happened to need a bit of a morale boost, and it turned out to be a magnificent precursor to the headiness of May (May '98, in case any of you haven't been hipped to this yet, was the single most significant month in the history of BFD's development - we gained a lot of ground in those seven gigs). In April, BFD did a gig at the Roxy which was hugely important to me, and thank goodness it was a great success, but it was quickly followed by a mostly solo gig at Lumpy Gravy during which I felt like I lost a lot of ground. I was an adrift little artist and I found myself questioning my abilities; then I had to go to Boston and supervise a batch of Berklee students, most of whom hadn't recorded before, in the rehearsal and recording of a clump of weird songs by this kid Opperman, who had been inundating me with email, charts and tapes for quite some time. I never listened to the tapes but I looked at the charts and met with him at a couple of Vai gigs - I admired his spirit and ambition, and he was really funny. So he hired me to

produce his album and I said sure, but spiritually I wasn't completely there yet. It's a hard thing to use the word "spiritually" in 1999 and not sound like you're ripping off people who rip off Jewel, but I couldn't think of a better word. I'm in Boston and start having the time of my life. I get to a rehearsal and hear Oppy's music for the first time. My jaw hits the ground. What a fascinating hybrid - my first impression was if Monk and Zappa wrote a Broadway musical about cans, it might sound like this. But the more I focused on Oppy's piano style and his arrangements I realized that there was real individuality there; he was receiving messages to which other people are denied access. Here's what I wrote about his music in the liner notes to the CD: "Can you imagine a silken scarf, studded with turquoise Necco wafers?

Opperman's music starts on the 'and of 2.' If you think you understand it, you're wrong. There's this weird little plot of land occupying a hitherto unexplored region between rock, jazz, contemporary classical, and some weird fucking make nobody can explain. There's Opperman. I don't know if you'll ever get there, but Opperman'll let you watch." I wrote that while I was spectacularly drunk at a party at Ty Paulsen's (drummer on the album) apartment, but I meant it and still do. The making of the album was probably the most fun I've ever had in a recording studio - definitely in the top two. All participants were smashingly capable and enthused. Lots of hangers-on, too, which really doesn't bother me - there was a constant and wonderfully amusing parade of personalities throughout the sessions. We worked all night and day for three days - engineer Steve Revilak and I became a mean recording machine. I frankly adored being the big guy in charge of all these young'uns, and I could feel my temporarily drained creative power and self-confidence returning a thousand-fold. By the end of the session I felt completely unstoppable (if very exhausted), returned to my band in California, and May '98 happened. This album is packed with memories for me: "Sophia's Dream" - it was Oppy's dream, actually, to have his first-ever CD (out of a planned 50, to be released one per year) start with a song featuring a five-minute guitar solo from me. Sorry, Op, it's only three and a half, but I wouldn't change a thing about it, especially the communication between myself and Ty that happened - check out the moment of absolutely inexplicable synchronicity at 4:30. There was a lot of happy screaming in the control room during the playback of that moment. The main body and ending of this song was recorded completely live, two guitars, piano, bass, marimba and drums - I think Oppy said somewhere that my guitar was overdubbed in San Diego, but that's wrong wrong wrong. I didn't bring any gear with me to Boston, but Joe Conley (one of the two main guitarists on the album) had a Clapton Strat and a Rivera 2x12 100 watt amp, my regular guitar and amp, so I felt

awfully darned at home. The Netherworld section in the middle was concocted in a matter of mere minutes at Double Time in San Diego; Oppy and I piled on synth overdubs until it sounded sufficiently evil, and then I whispered into the Eventide on a couple of tracks - voila! The Netherworld! We accomplished a lot in a very short time on this album. The other happy thing in this song happened during the mastering, when we matched up Oppy's San Diego-recorded synth line at the end of the Netherworld section to the fade-in of his Boston-recorded grand piano performance of the same line - more happy screaming. "Shipped To The Sky" - Jim Klewin's guitar solo on this was recorded around 4:00 AM towards the end of the session - we were all beat and Jim really wanted to nail a good one. After several attempts he thrust forth the manly solo heard on the CD - yet more happy screaming. He received a pile of condoms for his efforts. "The 22nd Overture" - what a beast. The basic track for this was the first thing recorded at the sessions - nice way to start an album. There's so much beautiful music in this song - my favorite moment is the chord which the final sung "amen" resolves to, on the downbeat of the fast section in five. Everybody worked very hard to make this song happen, it was an intense team effort. And I had fun playing the woodblocks. Opperman's fiendishly twisted piano solo tells you a lot about Opperman the guy - and you need to see his look of utter, stock-still concentration while he plays that sort of stuff. I think he's a riveting performer. This is a good time to mention percussionist Tricia Williams, a little 20-year old phenom who showed up at rehearsal, folded out the chart to this tune upon her marimba and proceeded to kill everyone in the room with her calm efficiency and massive talent. She's all over this song, doing a great job. "Snot Woman: Act I, Scene 4" - Chris had to talk me into doing the spoken part on this, twice I think, because I was actually sort of offended by it. But it ended up being fun to do, and the unthinkably cute Amy Millette does a fabulous job as Snot Woman. "The Park Bench Canal" - I think this is both Oppy's and my favorite song on the album. It's perfect! Such a killer little melody. "Sharel's Lullabye I" and "The Day Big Bird Turned Blue" - what I think of when I hear these two disturbed little computer pieces is hearing them for the first time in Oppy's filthy little dorm room on headphones, reading the charts, and both of us just laughing our heads off at all the little musical jokes Oppy has stuck in there. You really need to be standing next to Chris with a chart in your hand to get the full benefit of what these two pieces have to offer. "Ain't Got No Beef" - the opening trumpet chorale with weeping melody, the opening and closing comedy skits, and the lead vocals, were done at Double Time, and gosh, talk about a good time. We laughed forever. I think the most fun was when Jeff Forrest broke out the sound effects

CDs for the fight scene at the end, and this one little flying whistle sound that pokes through at one point - we cracked up for about a half and hour at that. Back in Boston the abiding memory from this song is a guy named Ron who attended the sessions; he had a different dance for each stylistic shift in the song and provided us with a lot of entertainment. I think Oppy was planning at one point to have pictures of Ron's dances in the CD booklet to illustrate the song, but the always amazing mr. wolrab won out.

"Lincoln, Lincoln" - piling on the voices was a lengthy process, but really funny, and very rewarding as the chords began to come to life. Hearing the choir nail this in rehearsal was a great moment, too - the instrumentalists were in one Berklee rehearsal room practicing stuff, while the singers were in another, and when they were ready to sing this song for Chris they sent a messenger over. We all tromped over and heard them sing this, perfectly the first time out. One or two of the singers from rehearsal didn't make it to the recording, though, so Tim Franklin had to sing several different parts. The funniest thing about the recording was Tim's faux-basso profundo, which he could only achieve by INHALING as he sang. Listen to the lowest-pitched vocal and realize that it is being inhaled as it is sung, and it will enhance your enjoyment of the track.

"Beware Of The Random Factor" - for me, a close second to "Park Bench" for my favorite track on the album. Oppy has done this with BFD live on several occasions, playing the melody on trumpet, but the vibe of this studio recording is very special. I love the sound of the wah guitar, and I am happy to claim responsibility for making Chris Eskola overdub three trombones on the last repeat of the melody - I love that texture to death. Since I have yet to work with horns on my own albums, it was great fun to mess around with them on this album.

"Send Your Money" - Notable is Joe Conley's guitar solo, which occasionally sounds so much like me it's a little scary. Cynthia Levinson's "yeah, take it bitch" during the Hell section is a reference to the punch line of the single most prevalent joke of the session, which involves an elephant and a mouse. It's a good joke. "Flute cat go boom" at the end of the spoken intro (you can also hear me weeping the phrase twice during the intro to "Beef") was an onomatopaeic verbal drum fill which I uttered at various times during the sessions, and which found favor in the swirling cranium of Opperman.

"Sharel's Lullabye II" - on the last day of the sessions, I finished my work around 6:00 AM or something and had to scoot to the airport right away to catch a flight home. It was an emotional time, because we'd all been through a lot together, but there was no time to be sentimental about it 'cause I had to leave right away. Immediately upon my departure, Oppy recorded this piano solo. It moves me very deeply. Anyway, this is a real good album.

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