



# worldbanco

Having spent the best part of this century chasing, and then reclaiming, ownership of his own songs Toby Marks can finally return to doing what he does best, making music, only this time around he's also got something to say.

“What I really want to do is play in a band again, not be the centre of attention but just be the guitarist, part of a group of people making music, I really miss playing with other people...”

Toby Marks and I have just wound up a most diverting chat about his upcoming new album *You Are Here*, an album made entirely with software and computers. He is enthusiastic about the album and the tour he's planning to support it, but as we part he leaves me with, what will be to many, the surprise comment you see above.

Lest we forget Toby Marks, the creative force behind Banco De Gaia, was one of a positive avalanche of new names to emerge from the primal acid house ooze, only unlike the majority of the era's one trick ponies he immediately began to experiment with dub, rock, funk, prog, techno, jazz, hip hop, film soundtracks and numerous other global influences.

Indeed when you dig even deeper into his past you will find a Pink Floyd loving guitarist who played everything from Banghra to rock and was actually playing guitar in a jazz band (having tired of a rock scene dominated by the histrionic likes of Joe Satriani) when he discovered the brave new world of samplers. So the desire to get back to the days of communal music making is far less surprising than you might think.

## Coofy Behaviour

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Toby has made the long train journey up from his west country home/studio to give us an insight into the world events that have driven the themes of his latest album and how he managed to reclaim his back catalogue from the clutches of Mickey Mouse. No really...

“What happened was I was signed to Planet Dog and they were licensed to Ultimate in the UK and to Mammoth in the States. Mammoth were then bought out by Universal who in turn became part of Disney.”

And then Ultimate fell over?

“Right, now Planet Dog finally got the rights back from Ultimate after a two year legal battle but we then had to hunt down what had happened in America a very long drawn out process which finally led to the Disney office in LA,” he shakes his head, still obviously bitter about the whole experience. “It took a hell of a

lot of dedication and money to get it back, and the biggest thing for me was not so much I didn't own it, although obviously that was a big part of it, but that it was all unavailable, people wanted to buy my music but from around '98 onwards almost my entire back catalogue was unavailable. The maddest thing was Pinnacle actually had stock but they couldn't sell it because nobody knew who owned it!”

Utter madness, and the ‘how mad is that’ shrug that follows would shame Marcel Marceau

“I think the whole idea of a lifetime recording or publishing deal where you don't actually own your own work ever again is ridiculous” he shakes his head again, “that just shouldn't happen, but it still does, and you really don't understand the ramifications when you're young.”

Asked if the expense involved would be recouped through re-releasing the back catalogue he flashes a wan smile

“Umm, well in the long term I'm sure it will definitely be worth it. But so far I have pretty much just broken even.”

It would be nice to think that, with all the information and hard luck tales available, young musicians nowadays would be aware of the pitfalls but sadly this isn't the case, and even more importantly, as Toby points out, the shelf life of a ‘record company project’ is now probably shorter than at any other time in history.

“Absolutely, everything is so transient now! The most important thing released this week no-one in the big companies will give a fuck about in six months, so as the big money moves on and that work ends up languishing in a vault somewhere, and the whole thing started out with a few people getting together and playing music they wanted other people to hear. Just think how much music is written and released each year and then how much of that is still available twelve months later?”

## Fade To Gray

Having been a lifelong follower of the Banco De Gaia muse (from way back in the days when he used to take to the stage with a torch strapped to his head – something Orbital refined some time later), I have to admit that *You Are Here* is perhaps the least immediate of his albums, something which prompts Toby to

look slightly glum and also elicits a large sigh.

“Well, I'd like to think people will like it the first time they hear it and then got more out of it with repeat listens, I definitely don't want to think that this is difficult or demanding music,” he pulls at his nose pensively, “I dunno... I thought this album was potentially more direct and accessible...”

In fact the album reveals itself to have a great deal of hidden depth on subsequent listens but it is certainly far more of a grower, and in fact is possibly the most mellow album he has made to date. Again he looks slightly pensive.

“You're not the first person to say that,” he admits, “and then I sat down and looked at the tempos and how the tracks were structured and yeah, there are banging techno tracks but there's also twelve minute vocal tunes, and there are a couple of more down-tempo dubby things, which I have done before, but the overall balance, opposed to say *Maya*... yeah, I now realise it's definitely more of a living room album, but it wasn't a conscious decision, I was predicting it was going to be in your face and up-tempo.”

Twelve minute vocal tunes? Also not something you normally associate the Banco De Gaia, but, and here is one of the reasons the album is such a slow burner, it's tracks like *Gray Over Gray* that repay repeat listens the most.

“Well once again, that track wasn't planned it was almost purely improvised, I was in the states DJ-ing, and I wanted to do a track with Jennifer Folker who sang on the last album and we had already been working on *Tongue In Chic* at a distance so we had planned to hook up and get the vocal down but I knew Jen would only take a few hours to get the vocal down so I fired up the computer and put together a four chord sequence in Logic, looped it and got her to improvise over it and we did the whole track in one take.”

No edits?

“There was one bit where the computer stopped, but the performance was so stunning there was no need to mess with it. I did some work on the backing but the tracks length was purely dictated by what she sang.”

There are also, what can best be described as multi-national globalisation themes touched on throughout the album, yet again an area Toby has generally steered clear of, so what I wonder

prompted this more politicised approach?

“I think one of the reasons I make music is escapism,” he explains, “I always liked the idea that music could create a better place to be, whether in your mind or your soul, and I always thought of Banco De Gaia as an uplifting experience, but inevitably what has been happening over the last few years globally has affected everyone. There are issues I have been concerned about for years, but I have resisted bringing them into my music. However the last few years have been such that I couldn't not bring them into the music, just reflecting the fact that more and more people feel aggrieved enough to protest. I did try to bring peoples attention the problems in Tibet some years ago but I don't recall feeling quite so motivated to comment on political issues since then.”



Photo: Euginie Arrowsmith