

The Long, Long Story of the *Bleach House* 25 Project

I can't imagine anyone would want to read all this, but I keep getting asked the question: "How could you possibly be recording something for 25 years?" And I'm tired of answering it. It wasn't a plan I could summarize easily. It wasn't a plan at all. So here's the whole story. If you'd like to read it, be my guest.

A Clean Image

It all started with a band called *Bleach House*, and *Bleach House* started in 1998, when I answered an ad in the New York Press for a young guitarist named Steve Schiltz, who was looking for a band. I went out to Astoria (Queens), where he was living, and played him some tunes. A week or so later, we had our first gig at an open mic at Sparky's Ale House in Carroll Gardens (Brooklyn), where we were billed as *Ed and Steve*. At the next open mic, we were billed as *Looking For a Rhythm Section*, and then we got a rhythm section -- Dave (Marchese) bass, and Chris (Kripas) drums, and we became *Bleach House*, named after a laundromat in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn. Steve wasn't even old enough to drink, so I thought the band ought to have a clean image. Dave and Chris agreed, and Steve kind of rolled his eyes, so we all voted on laundromat names. *Bleach House* won, but *Sudsorama* was another contender, and *Duck Out of Order*, a sign on a mechanical toy outside of a laundromat, was a wild card. Who Needs Madison Square Garden? We've Got The Orange Bear

Soon after, *Bleach House* debuted at a dive bar in Tribeca (NYC) called the Orange Bear, where the old-timers drank Jim Beam Rye during the day (little realizing rye would become a trendy beverage years later). I guess the other band didn't show up, because they asked us to do another set. But once was enough for The Orange Bear.

Parting Gig at Luna Lounge

We played our last show at Luna Lounge on the Lower East Side (NYC) in 2000. All in all, we played maybe a couple dozen gigs at various places, mainly Downtown neighborhoods of NYC. Along the way we had two studio sessions, recorded on the troublesome (and now outdated) ADAT SVHS tape format. That was because I owned an ADAT.

Our First Studio Date

The first studio date at Tarquin studios, in Bridgeport Connecticut, didn't go very well. It wasn't the right spot for us, we didn't like what we were hearing, and Dave and Steve were sick. After a huddle, we decided to just focus on getting the drums, as those are hard to record yourself. We all played along, while Chris managed to get some takes. By the end of the session, Steve was laying on his back playing guitar.

Other tracks were recorded at Steve's apartment in Queens and mine in Brooklyn using a little Mackie portable mixer as a preamp, and going from there into my ADAT. So, I was the engineer, and between me and the equipment, the tracks were not very well recorded. The drums from Tarquin also had some issues, bleed from us playing in the background, and quite a bit of noise. Plus, I couldn't retrieve all the tracks. For instance on Ocean, I only have a mono drum mix to work with. So the tracks from this first round have been a challenge.

Second Time's A Charm

After we decided to go our separate ways, we did another session. This was at K Studios in Brooklyn (NY) and we went in with a plan. I was having some pretty serious elbow problems, that were being treated with NSAIDS that caused reflux and thus some serious vocal problems. So the plan was to record everybody else and I would play along and just do scratch tracks. After all, I had my ADAT, I could take my time. That's what we did, Steve, Dave and Chris are all recorded live in the studio, except Steve added some overdubs on the spot. These songs, didn't have the problems of the previous ones.

Some Quick Mixes

Back in the day, I slapped together some vocals and guitar and did some quick mixes for some of the songs. I always meant to do more, but I thought I'd wait. I was still having some arm and vocal problems, and I wanted to redo stuff and I also felt there was more stuff to be done. The songs are fairly long, and I felt like they needed more things to change instrumentally and vocally to work -- i.e., verse 3 shouldn't sound exactly like verse 1, etc. However, time marched on, my elbow kept hurting, and my ADAT kept breaking (as is their habit).

Baltimore: Land of Crabcakes and ADATS

I moved to Baltimore in 2012. My elbow was feeling a little better, and I was playing again. I joined a band that gigged at small venues, Sidebar, Reverb, etc. Then one day, I was walking down Charles Street near Johns Hopkins, and I saw something peculiar. It was an ADAT sitting on the front lawn with a handwritten note on top -- "\$20 Works."

"Are you sure it works?" I asked. "Have you played it?"

"Well, it turns on, and the tape spins around. Don't really know how to listen to it."

"Any error messages?"

"No, and it's only 20 bucks. Why don't you take a chance?"

Here We Go Again

Somehow, I got the bug again. I took it home, and it did indeed work. I was able to dump some tracks onto my PC before the ADAT broke (as is their habit). I bought a decent preamp, (and another ADAT for more dumping) and started recording. I wasn't really working in earnest. Once in a while, I would do a track. COVID came along and everything stopped. Then, around 2023, it struck me -- time was running out. I applied for Social Security, and I started working in earnest on some things that were important to me, one of them was finishing at least a few of the songs I had recorded with Bleach House.

I started retracking the lead vocals about 10 years ago, but I guess about 90% of my instrumental tracks here are from the last couple of years. Also, I added a lot of instruments I had never used before with *Bleach House* (or at all): acoustic guitar, baritone guitar, 8-string tenor & baritone ukuleles, 4-string electric ukulele, guitar synth, you name it. I didn't have arrangements in mind; I just played along and tried to come up with stuff on the fly where I felt a song needed something more. I threw out many more tracks than I used.

Another Voice

I had always wanted some harmonies and background vocals. I tried that too, but it wasn't working. I realized I needed a different voice, and I needed somebody better, much better. So I got in touch with Teda, who lives in North Macedonia. We were working from two different continents, on tracks that spanned decades, but she connected with the material immediately. Ultimately, it felt like the same dynamic as when I was going over a song with Chris, Dave, and Steve, back in that living room in Astoria. Obviously, the shared experience and collective energy of a band gigging together over a couple of years is a different process; than working over the internet. But ultimately it comes down to the same thing. The back and forth of working on a song transcends boundaries of time and space. It feels right, or it doesn't. Things connect, or they don't.

In the end, I felt like everything fit. It sounds like a strange process, many of these songs predate Bleach House and were written all the way back in the 1980s. But it didn't feel odd; it felt right.

More Later? – Maybe, Maybe Not...

There are some more tracks I fished out that I've been working on. Maybe I'll finish them. Some songs may be lost forever due to tape issues. My last ADAT is broken, as is their habit. This may be all she wrote for *Bleach House* 25. Or maybe there is a bit more. Whatever happens, it's been a wild ride.