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GARY LUCAS: "Meeting and working with Captain Beefheart and Jeff Buckley were extremely important things in my life".

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*Some of you will associate his name with **Jeff Buckley**. Others, perhaps, to that of **Captain Beefheart**... but **Gary Lucas** is one of those artists unknown to many, who has in his resume practically a who's who in music. Now that he has just released "**The Essential**", a lavish double album compiling his 40-year career, we chatted with him so that he could tell us about some of his -at times- incredible adventures. In addition to the aforementioned, **Lou Reed, Nick Cave, Iggy Pop, Chris Cornell, Bryan Ferry, David Johansen**... and even a famous Hollywood actor. Dive with us into the story of a life dedicated to music.*

Gary is also, and among many other things, a true archivist. His website, www.garylucas.com, is probably the most complete one a musician has. Hundreds of stories, photos, music, rarities, articles... to spend hours and hours diving into. He is a born communicator. Chatting with him for two hours, you perceive how he puts the same passion into telling what happened as he did when he created the music he is talking about. His discography is practically unmanageable, with a list that reaches approximately 40 references. That's not counting his collaborations and unreleased material. As he himself laughingly says, "**I think I must be the only person in the whole world who has listened to all my records**". In love with our country, the last time he was in Spain was in 2019 performing live the soundtrack of "**El Ángel Exterminador**", **Buñuel's film** with original score by **Raúl Lavista**. Because that's another one: Gary often tours with his audiovisual show in which while a classic film is projected, he performs live the soundtrack, original his own, although with fragments of the originals. He has done so with "**The Golem**", **Dreyer's "Vampyr"**, **James Whale's "Frankenstein"** or "**Dracula**", but not **Lugosi's**, but the Hispanic version of the same year, 1931, directed by **George Melford**, with the Spaniard **Carlos Villarías** as the Count and the Mexican **Lupita Tovar**, as **Eva (Mina)**. This Hispanic version was filmed simultaneously to the well known one directed by **Tod Browning** during the nights, in the same sets where in the mornings the director of "**Freaks**" filmed with **Lugosi**, and it was believed lost until in the 70's a copy was discovered in the Havana film library. And now you can even watch it on YouTube... an amazing film, really. But in this interview, we leave the more classic films for another time (although **Gary** told me how he discovered the Spanish **Dracula**... incredible) and we focus on the music. Welcome to an unparalleled journey.

First of all, Gary, for those who are not very familiar with your music, how would you describe your sound and philosophy? It's just that you've played a lot of different styles?

"Well, in essence, I consider myself a Blues guitar player so everything I play, be it rock, jazz, psychedelia, soundtracks...has a Blues flavor to it. Blues has always guided my life and I believe that its language is universal. It allows communication between different cultures, it's like a universally appreciated common thread. My only philosophy is to make my guitar express itself as a person, to transmit feelings, sometimes of joy, sometimes of sadness, of peace, of love...and I believe that the Blues is probably the only type of music capable of bringing together all human feelings".

In a way, do you feel undervalued as a musician? I ask you this because, as you know, you are better known for your collaborations with many other artists than as an author, something that "The Essential" should remedy. I'm sure many people will discover you with this double album.

"Yes, I know, it's true what you say and I'm aware of it but I'm not worried about it. In fact, the idea of releasing this compilation is precisely that, to show my wide range of music to a potentially new audience. I feel very proud of everything I have done, all the collaborations, solo albums, soundtracks and so on. For many people I am a cult musician, for others an unknown, for others the guy who once played with Jeff Buckley... it doesn't matter, the important thing is that I have always played the music that makes me happy, collaborated with some of the most important artists of all time, who have trusted me, and I can only be grateful for all that music has given me. If I am not better known is because no major label ever bet on me but since I was able to quit my normal job in the mid 90's - I worked for CBS promoting artists like Michael Jackson, Springsteen, Journey, REO Speedwagon (laughs)...I didn't like them all, but it paid the bills - and since I dedicated myself exclusively to music, everything has been joys, one after the other. And I'm still here, I don't plan to stop, in fact, I have two new albums ready to be released in the next few months, very different from each other... we'll talk about them later". (laughs)

"The Essential" features some of the long list of collaborations you've done in your career. And you've chosen as a single, "One Man's Meat", with David Johansen.

"I met Dave in 1977 when he had already left the New York Dolls. A friend at the time had designed some clothes for him and I thought he was a great guy and very talented, a restless artist. When in 1989 I formed my own Psych Jazz Rock band, Gods & Monsters, at first we did instrumental music but I felt that some songs needed a vocalist and I started looking. There was never a steady singer... in fact, Jeff Buckley was in and out for about a year, until I decided to sing myself and save myself a lot of trouble (laughs). And from time to time I proposed it to some friends, and one of them, of those who accepted, was David. He wrote the lyrics himself and I love the song, an aggressive Blues Rock opus that suits him like a glove. Now, I decided to give it a 'facelift' and I'm very happy, it's being the perfect spearhead of the album".

Let's review a little bit of your career. You started with Captain Beefheart as a mentor. Tell us how you got to know him.

"Get comfortable because this isn't going to be short (laughs). I first heard of him in the late '60s, while I was in high school, and I bought his second LP, 'Strictly Personal' thanks to a chat with a new friend I made at the time. It was one day when I was carrying a record by The Move and that guy, who had the longest hair I had ever seen, was carrying a guitar with 'Capatain Beefheart and His Magic Band' written in marker pen on the case; I asked him who that was and he replied that it was the band his brother had just produced... and when he told me his name, Fred Perry, it dawned on me that his brother was Richard Perry, who had also produced Tiny Tim, whose first record, 'God Bless Tiny Tim', I loved. About six months later, 'Trout Mask Replica' was released, produced by Frank Zappa, and I bought that too because I was such a fan of his. That record made a big impact on me: improvisations, noise... all structured in a brilliant way. When I went to Yale University a couple of years later to study literature, I showed the lyrics of the album to a famous writer of Polish origin named Jerzy Kosinski -later author of 'Being There', among other things- and he thought it was very sophisticated. I only needed to see him live and that happened in 1971, in New York, and it blew my mind. I still think it's the best concert I've ever seen, it literally changed my life. And I began to dream that if I ever went into music, playing with that artist would be my greatest aspiration. Then, a

concert of his was announced at Yale, and that's when I went crazy (laughs). The director of the university radio station, with which I was collaborating, asked me if I wanted to interview him on the phone to promote the show and so I did... that interview is posted on my SoundCloud and you can hear my nervous voice (laughs). Don was very nice to me and we met in person before the concert...in fact, I went off with him and his wife Jan to hang out with him. From then on, whenever he came to perform near Yale, I would meet him and we developed a good friendship. He gave me his phone number and I would call him from time to time and sometimes we would spend more than an hour chatting...".

Didn't you have aspirations of becoming a musician at that time?

"Yes... well... I fantasized about it but I didn't think I was good enough, and in fact I didn't tell Don I played guitar until much later. In 1975, he came to Syracuse with Frank Zappa as a guest, and that night he told me he'd like to go out for some ribs and barbecue sauce. I knew one of those that were open after midnight, it was actually in the Black Ghetto of Syracuse behind a guy's house where there was a great funky, bluesy atmosphere; Don burst out singing a few songs a cappella to the people there and at that point I jumped in and said, 'Don, if you ever get your Magic Band going again, I'd love to audition for you.' He was without a band at the time, and he said, 'Gary, do you mean you play guitar? Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me?'... and he invited me to come to the show he had in Boston a few days later and told me I could play for him afterwards. I took my guitar and took the bus there, and when the show was over we went to his hotel and I played for him for the first time. He said he liked the way I played but he couldn't make anything concrete at the time, and on top of that I had a plane ticket to Taipei scheduled for a few weeks later, so this idea was in limbo for awhile. When I came back from the Far East a few years later I rang him up and we resumed our relationship. We kept talking on the phone regularly and eventually in 1980 he invited me to play on the new album he was recording, 'Doc At The Radar Station'. The solo composition he asked me to play on it was not easy - well, like everything he did - but I came out on top. 'Flavor Bud Living' was very complex but I managed to nail it in one or two takes. The album received very good reviews and I toured with him in Europe and the US just to play that track plus a couple more, and my playing received a lot of praise, so it put my name on the musical map. Don also asked me, along with my wife Ling, to do management work for him, and I participated fully on the next album, 'Ice Cream For Crow', which would eventually be his last, before he retired from music to devote himself to painting. There I had the honor of being credited as an official member of the Magic Band--my dream had been fulfilled!".

But I guess you kept in touch, didn't you?

"Well no... it's strange... I didn't talk to him again since the 1980s, and I stopped working with him in 1984. Once I sent him a message through a third party and he replied very kindly but I don't know... he didn't seem like the same person. Then in the 1990s he was very ill and went into almost complete seclusion. When I saw the short documentary Anton Corbijn made of him, 'Some Yo Yo Stuff' in the mid 90's I felt terrible for him, he was so deteriorated... it broke my heart, I was in shock, although I have continued to love him all this time. I found out about his death in 2010, the same day I was coming back from a trip to Havana, and just the night before I had remembered a little poem of his that I had written on the back cover of his album 'The Spotlight Kid'. A lot of sadness.

Did you get to have personal dealings with Zappa?

"I met him in person a couple of times, and I was and still am a big fan of his music, but between us there was no chemistry. The circumstances were not right, because I was working for Don, and at that time he and Frank had their differences, and of course, we members of Don's team were like the enemy to Frank. Too bad, I would have liked to have met him under better circumstances.

Let's move on to the other most important artist in your life: Jeff Buckley. How did your relationship begin?

"Yes. Meeting and working with Don and Jeff has been probably the two most important things in my life. My friend, producer Hal Willner, called me to participate in one of the first themed concerts he ever produced, Tim Buckley's Tribute concert at St. Ann's Church in Brooklyn in 1991. I love Tim, so I agreed right away, and Hal commented that it would be nice to invite Tim's son, who was living in Los Angeles and trying to make a name for himself in music. I told him I had no idea Tim had a son, and Hal said he had just found out (laughs). Well, a couple of days before the event, I went to rehearse at the church and, as I was picking up my gear, a young guy who was the spitting image of Tim came running up to me, all excited, and said, "You're Gary Lucas! I love the way you play guitar. I know your work with Captain Beefheart and I've seen you in Guitar Player magazine." I was very flattered, so I invited him to come to my apartment the next day to rehearse his father's song 'The King's Chain'. I put the microphone in front of him and then I heard the most fragile, magical, sinuous voice I had ever heard, like a choirboy mixed with an old bluesman with a pop sensibility. At that moment I knew this guy was going to be a star, and I told him so, and we began a relationship of great friendship and musical collaboration. When Columbia turned down the record I was working on with a female singer, I offered Jeff the chance to be the singer for Gods & Monsters, and he accepted, but since he hadn't moved to NY full time yet, he could only come in sometimes. He was in and out of the band for a year, in fact he left it for good essentially the day after we did a big public showcase for the BMG label Imago Records, who had given us some development monies. In any case I soldiered on and released my second album titled "Gods and Monsters" which I didn't include him on. It got 4 Stars anyway in Rolling Stone, without Jeff on it! But anyway, in that year we worked together, I sent two solo guitar instrumental pieces I'd composed on a cassette, and when he came back from Los Angeles to NYC in the summer of '91 he brought them back with lyrics and a toppling melody. They were originally titled by me 'And You Will' and 'Rise Up To Be', and Jeff retitled them, respectively, 'Mojo Pin' and 'Grace'... you know them, right? (laughs). Now, on 'The Essential', I've included the original demo of 'Grace'. Jeff was very easy to work with, he was incredibly talented, he is, without a doubt, the best collaborator and the coolest musician I've most likely ever worked with, sharing a throne with Don, of course. I play on those two songs on the 'Grace' album... he invited me to play at some of his shows, we had more songs finished and some new ones pending... and the next thing I knew he was gone and the tragic news of his passing was confirmed a few days later. What a shame... It was nice to release the album 'Songs to No One' in 2002 with those live takes at Knitting Factory and our songs recorded with him sitting mostly on my couch. On 'The Essential' there's also another unreleased song we wrote together, 'Story Without Words', sung by Jolene Grunberg with the the 65-piece Metropole Orkestra in Amsterdam's Paradiso. We could have done so much more together...we had plans...really, just talking about Jeff brings tears to my eyes."

You also worked with a friend and fan of his, who sadly is also no longer with us: Chris Cornell.

"I met Chris at Jeff's funeral in Brooklyn. Shortly after he died, there was a memorial service for him that was attended by the people closest to Jeff, about 50 people or so, there was Marianne Faithful, who said some very moving words... and several of his ex-girlfriends, like Rebecca Moore, and there was Chris, of course, but he didn't perform that day. We chatted for a while, got to know each other

better. Some time later, I sent him a letter suggesting a collaboration and he replied that he was preparing an album that a mutual friend of ours, Steve Lillywhite, was producing, and so I ended up playing on most of his 'Carry On' album."

Let's talk about some of your other great collaborations. It would be great to do it one by one but we would never finish (laughs). Let's see, for example, what about Iggy Pop?

"I played with him on a tribute album to Don Covay in 1993, produced by my old friend Jon Tiven. I played on the version of 'Sookie Sookie' with Iggy, Vernon Reid and Noel. But I had already met Iggy in person during the last days of Stooges, one day when they opened for Blue Öyster Cult, winter 1974, I think I remember. I had just discovered them with 'Raw Power' and loved that record. At that time, Iggy was going through a super-depressive stage and was notoriously taking a lot of drugs. combination of legal and illegal drugs was very fashionable in those days, and it destroyed many musicians' careers and lives. Fortunately, Iggy knew how to get out of all that".

What about Nick Cave?

"It happened in 1989. Nick was in New York to promote his first novel "And the Ass Saw the Angel" - —and we jammed together live on NPR (National Public Radio). He then came to see me perform at a record store called Lunch For Your Ears, he knew who I was - thanks to being a big Captain Beefheart fans, and he totally dug my playing. And to help me become better known in Europe, he invited me to a big alternative festival in Holland for a reading of excerpts from his book, him reciting and me playing guitar, as a duo, with me at the National steel-guitar. It was broadcast on the Dutch national radio and that recording was later included by me on my album 'Improve The Shining Hour'. It's also on my SoundCloud and on CD on my website." (laughs)

You also collaborated with Lou Reed...

"Oh!... Lou was one of the best. We met in June 1992 at John Zorn's First Festival of Radical Jewish Culture in Munich, where I was performing with the film 'The Golem'. There were also Marc Ribot, John Lurie... Sometimes I've said that my favorite guitar solo is 'I Heard Her Call My Name' by The Velvet Underground, crazy, atonal, mind-blowing... it has even been said to be the most damaging to the human ear. Well, at the airport I met Lou, we saw each other collecting the luggage, and he greeted me very warmly and thanked me for my words about him, which he had read in some magazine... I was amazed! He came to see my performance with the film and at the end he told me 'I could spend hours listening to you, Gary', and we agreed to meet in NY when we could. And so we did, we met a few times, we went to several shows together, we did jams... the last time I saw him was shortly before he died, at Carnegie Hall, where by chance we happened to be sitting next to each other to see David Byrne's play about Imelda Marcos".

It's a pity you didn't record anything together, what about Bryan Ferry?

"I met him in 1999 at a Harry Smith tribute concert, thanks to Hall Willner, and he was very familiar with me, it seemed like we had known each other all our lives. And I confessed to him that I was the first DJ to play Roxy Music in North America. I bought the first Roxy record the same day it came out." (laughs)

You were also a collaborator of Joan Osborne.

"Ah, Joan, what a wonderful artist! I co-wrote 'Spider Web' with her, for her album 'Relish', which was a big hit, it was even nominated for a Grammy. It was the producer of the album, Rick Chertoff, who called me because he knew of my love for Captain Beefheart, as did he and Joan."

Well, out of all the collaborations, which one would you choose as the strangest, most unexpected... that you've done? Something that might surprise us. (laughs)

"Well... that's it! Do you know Mark Sinclair?"

I don't know...

"(laughs) But if I tell you Vin Diesel, yes".

But, but... what are you telling me? (laughs) I remember reading that he wanted to record, or did record something, but I have no idea, I haven't followed him.

"Yes, I think he recorded something again, but I'm talking about 1985. I've been living in the West Village since 1977 and near my house there was an ice cream parlor called Minters, where there was a kid who was about 18 years old and very funny. He would breakdance in front of the store, do impersonations...he had a natural talent for showmanship. One day when I had taken ecstasy - the only time in my life I ever did - I called Minters to see if Mark could bring my wife and I some ice cream. At the time, I was working as a copywriter, working with Upside Records, Rough Trade, and other labels, and I was producing Peter Gordon, a friend of Arthur Russell's. Mark had told me he wanted to do rap, and shortly after he started working out at the gym, and got all pumped-up—he looked fantastic... ok, so it occurred to me and Geoff Travis at Rough Trade that getting Arthur and Mark together might be interesting. And so it was, I arranged the session and Mark rapped, Arthur supplied the beats, I was going to add guitar, The thing is that Arthur got angry with Mark over a throwaway remark and kind of subverted the session-- and after a while we gave up the experiment (laughs). Mark went on with bodybuilding and the rest you know, he became a movie star. I'm really happy for him, he's a great guy."

Gary is also very active on SSR and every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday he does a live stream from his Facebook page at 3pm EST. It is recommended to follow him.