

BUTCH HANCOCK – His Mind’s Got A Mind Of It’s Own
Austin Sun – December 1976

[Note, 2007: This was, I believe, the first article ever written about Butch Hancock.]

*My mind’s got a mind of its own.
Takes me out a-walkin’ when I’d rather stay at home,
Takes me out to parties when I’d rather be alone.
Lord, my mind’s got a mind of it’s own.*

*Been doin’ things I thought I’d never do!
Been getting’ into trouble without ever meaning to.
I no sooner settle down than I’m right back up again!
I feel just like a leaf out in the wind.*

*I seem to forget half the things I start.
Try to build a house and then I tear the place apart,
Freeze myself in fire and burn myself in ice,
I can’t count to one without thinking twice.*

*Tell myself to do the things I should,
Then I get to thinkin’ that them things ain’t any good.
I’d tell myself the truth but I know I’m lying like a snake.
You can’t walk on water at the bottom of the lake.*

My mind’s got a mind of it’s own...
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Watching people watch Butch Hancock sing for the first time is a lesson in the double-take. A song like “My Mind’s Got a Mind of Its Own” is a catchy two-step – you could square-dance to it if the dance floor was big enough. You’re drinking your beer, maybe talking to somebody, listening to Butch’s pleasant, cheerful voice with its Lubbock lilt, Butch is smiling as he sings, and then a line sails by like, “You can’t walk on water at the bottom of the lake.”

What?

You double-take, but it’s already gone. Still smiling Butch has eased into a pretty, West Texas-style slow one, “one of my own,” as he likes to say. You’re dancing cheek-to-cheek and everything seems normal as you hear

*The stars in my life will shine like sunshine
If only I can see your smiling face.
Though this universe collapses on occasion
The stars in my life will stay in place...*

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“Hey, wait a minute, *what* universe collapses?!” isn’t exactly the sweet nothing you’ll whisper in your partner’s ear. But I was told the story of a couple traveling in Mexico last summer who’d stopped to gaze at some view somewhere in the Sierra Madre, and, apropos of nothing, the man turned to the woman and said, “Butch Hancock writes great lyrics.”

These lyrics stay in your head and turn up at the oddest moments.

Most country-western composers write story-songs. Butch does “on occasion” – perhaps on those occasions when, unbeknownst to many, the universe just collapsed – but mostly his songs describe states of mind. From any one of them you could extrapolate many stories. Even (maybe especially) the love-songs, like this gentle waltz:

*There are stars in the sky that I’ve never seen.
I was born on top of the world.
But your full Southern Cross is a mystery to me
Just like your sweet Mother of Pearl...*

*And I’ve run and I’ve ridden more roads than I need
And all roads are crooked and curled,
But out of all of them roads every last one leads
Right to you, sweet Mother of Pearl.*

*I’ve laid on my back with my head in a swirl
And I’ve laid on my face in the sand.
And I know you can’t hold me, sweet Mother of Pearl,
But you can at least let me slip through your hands.*

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Butch doesn’t only write in non-linear flashes that catch up with you (or that you overtake) somewhere in Mexico... he talks like that too, and it can be discombobulating. I ran into him when he was putting up one of his Guy Juke posters, he asked me what I was doing and I told him we (the corporate “we,” *Sun* we) were thinking of doing an Apocalypse issue for Christmas. He laughed as though I’d telegraphed the punch-line before the end of the joke.

Then he said, “Lookin’ forward to the Apocalypse instead of backwards where it’s always been.”

Huh?

We were headed in different directions and he was halfway down the block before I could get past “Huh?” Still, I found myself repeating his line off and on for several days, telling it to other people. It had the same effect on them: for some reason that doesn’t make sense, the line made sense. As though the Apocalypse were with us, had been for some time, or it wouldn’t be such common currency in our conversation.

“Lookin’ forward to the Apocalypse instead of backwards where it’s always been.”

Days later, Butch wouldn’t elaborate much on that line, but looked around suddenly and said: “This *is* the Apocalypse. What greater Cosmic Trick could there be

than for all this to go on and on and on? It'll serve humanity right if they invent immortality."

*There's no use to hide, you've paid for your ride,
But your mainliner's failed you, my friend.
And it's fate, I suppose, but the depot is closed,
Your streamliner failed to come in.
The door to your pain is just plain disbelief.
You're locked in like you'll never know.
It takes more of a train than the Santa Fe Chief
To take you where you want to go.*

*There's no use to run, the damage is done,
The skies are gonna fall in on you.
And the goldmine you found, well it's still underground,
Your steam shovel failed to come through...
You better sail to the west, you got a bad chance at best,
You're locked out like you'll never know.
It takes more of a boat than the ocean can float
To take you where you want to go.*

*There's no use to perform on the eve of the storm,
There'll be no crowd out there tonight.
And your childhood dreams, they'll never come true it seems,
Your tightrope won't even be tight.
So let the trapeze surprise you, while the clowns all advise you
To swing faster before you grow up...
The wings of your cares are just putting on airs,
So look out for your two feet below.
It takes more of a dream than a circus can scream
To get you where you've gotta go.
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Now that the world's on indefinite tornado watch, it's good to have some danceable country music with lyrics that can find their way out of a bar. It makes Butch Hancock one of the most unusual singers to hit Austin.

He's certainly one of the most personally cheerful and least assuming. Maybe too unassuming, his critics say, believing he could be a much bigger name here if he were more ambitious, more of a showman. He doesn't seem interested. "I don't want people to confuse certain images with my songs, when these images don't have a damn thing to do with my songs. For instance, I don't wear cowboy hat and boots," he says with a genuine West Texas accent that would pass for "cowboy" anywhere.

*Well I ain't got a lick of sense, I got a crazy mind,
'Cause I don't wanna leave and I don't wanna stay behind.
At the end of this one last road, they say, there's always an open door*

An' I guess my bare feet'll hafta carry me one road more.

“The Apocalypse was yesterday. Judgment Day, Doomsday, it all *happened*. So here we are, it's the day after the Apocalypse, now what? What'll we think of next?”

Then he sings something he and Jimmy Dale Gilmore worked up:

Yesterday was Judgment Day!

How'd ya do? How ya'd do?

Were you sleeping when your daydreams and your nightmares all came true?

Did you wind up in Heaven or did you wind up in Hell?

But you never guessed that it would be so hard to tell.

Were you pickin' up the tempo or putting on country style?

Is one inch of country music worth a River City mile?

Is an outlaw still an outlaw if the law is not in the way?

So much for macho music, yesterday was Judgment Day.

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