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hello
**CHERRY
CREEK
NORTH**

dining in
**CHERRY
CREEK**

the legendary
BERNIE TAUPIN
ON ELTON JOHN, ART,
AND WHY HE LOVES
CHERRY CREEK

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CHERRY CREEK'S
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THE STORYTELLER

BERNIE TAUPIN TOLD THE STORIES AND WROTE THE SONGS FOR ELTON JOHN.

NOW, AFTER AN EXHIBIT IN CHERRY CREEK NORTH, IT'S HIS ARTWORK THAT HAS FANS SINGING ALONG.

WORDS BY KEVIN MARR



"I don't just write stuff and send it to him."

Bernie Taupin seems a tad annoyed.

And he should be.

I had just asked him if what I had read about his writing strategy with Elton being somewhat uncommunicative and more of a hand off was accurate. It was not. Full on urban myth.

"I think people minimized it too much," he begins. "They look at a less-than-aesthetic sort of sensibility because there's much more to it than that, and much more discussion involved. I'll talk to him about what I've written, and it's not about him wanting to understand what something is about. It's more about how he sees that particular song."

This is why I ask. Let's flush out the misinformed reporting and lazy journalism from the past that may have become a fly in the ointment in covering this guy's life. I've got the man right next me. At the bar. In the Halcyon. Mid-day on a glorious weather-gifted Saturday in May. So, I'm asking and he's answering. By the way, for formality's sake, the aforementioned "Elton" is Elton John. But you knew that.

And without the British-born bloke sitting to my right in black-rimmed glasses and clad in a black cap, dark denim button-down, grey t-shirt, and khaki trousers, Sir Elton might still be Reggie Dwight. You see, Elton couldn't write lyrics, and Bernie...well, Bernie Taupin is a living legend on the subject.

"When we go to make a record, which we made last October and it's going to come out this October, we have a discussion about things, and we talk about the kind of record we want to make. There is a lot of interconnection."

Sipping ice water from a cocktail tumbler, the man who has spanned the globe repeatedly now explains what has brought his travels to Cherry Creek. Fascination St. Fine Art has featured Taupin's latest work, and to say the project has been well received by collectors and longtime admirers would be a drastic miscalculation in the art of understatements.

"Hosting Bernie Taupin was an extraordinary experience, evidenced by the dozens of collectors who flew in from across the country," Fascination St. owner Sean Moore explains. "Witnessing them moved to tears upon meeting Bernie and acquiring his artwork is a testament to the profound impact he's had on so many lives."

Reflections Redux is a collection of lyrics in stencil form and prints on lithographs that celebrates Taupin's and John's most iconic verses. *Tiny Dancer*.

The Bitch is Back. Rocket Man. Bennie and the Jets. Crocodile Rock. Goodbye Yellow Brick Road. Bernie shares that the concept, innocent and fun in nature, was the result of he and his wife Heather delving into all of the iconic lines that people really relate to, and then creating something around that.

At Fascination St., he was the life of a two-day party. Signing his work for buyers. Taking countless pictures. Sharing stories. Laughing and socializing with attendees who were there solely to see him. And throughout it all, including our chat at the bar, he unwittingly confirmed yet another misnomer I had read about him that turned out to be low grade fertilizer. Bernie is NOT shy. Far from it in my estimation.

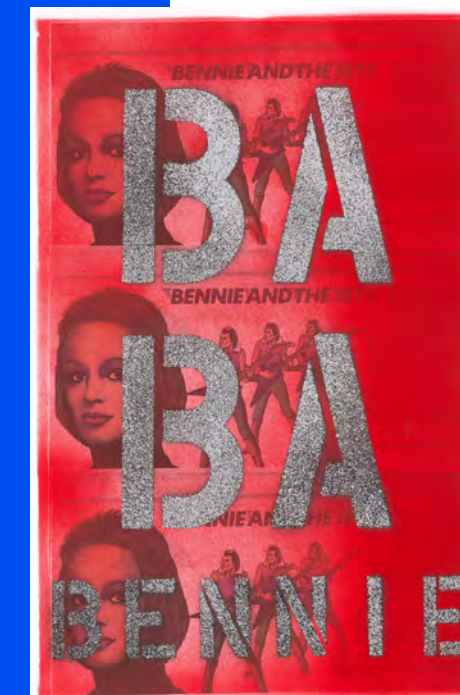
"No. That's bullsh*t," he says without pause. "I think the 'shy' reference comes from when I was starting out. I was young and I was learning from people who knew more than I did, so I was just a quiet kid taking it all in. I wouldn't call it 'shy,' I'd call it 'reticent.' I'm not good in crowds and it's not because I'm shy, but because I don't feel I know how to be accessible to everybody who wants to be in my space...if that makes sense."

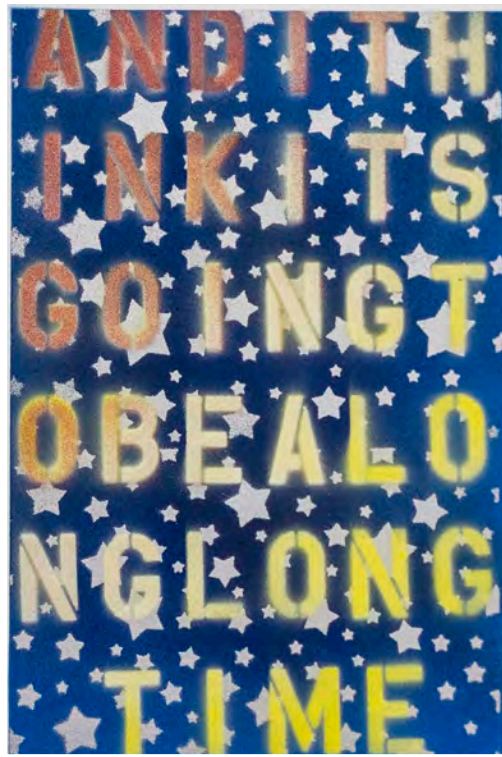
It makes perfect sense. Taupin and Elton took the world by musical storm back in 1970. Since then, everyone and their grandmother have wanted access to this duo of storytelling superheroes whose music, to this day, continues its magnificent parade of timelessness and incomparable narratives.

This legendary union originated in 1967 when both men answered the same job ad. Music producer and publisher Ray Williams would end up handing Elton an envelope of unknown song writing after John admitted he couldn't write song lyrics. The envelope contained Bernie's submitted work. It would serendipitously fuse the future of two unsuspecting superstars.

As excited as he is for this Denver leg of Reflections Redux, Taupin will soon have eyes for another port of call. Mind you, he arrived a day earlier in Colorado after a speaking engagement in front of 3,000 people in London. Tomorrow will find him home in the Santa Ynez Valley outside of Santa Barbara. It's been his sanctuary since 1994. When he first arrived, Bernie was cowboying it up on his ranch, raising horses, and was a non pro cutter and roper for 10 years. "It's something I always wanted to do. I'm one of those people that if you want to live your dream then you've got to go out and do it. If you fall flat on your face, at least no one can say you didn't try, right?"

Over 20 years ago, Bernie married Heather. Two daughters would follow. Now, his perfect day isn't painting the town red in Paris or being honored with an award in Lake Como. It's being with his family in





"HE WAS BORN A PAUPER TO A PAWN ON A CHRISTMAS DAY
WHEN THE NEW YORK TIMES SAID, 'GOD IS DEAD AND THE WAR'S BEGUN'
OH, ALVIN TOSTIG HAS A SON TODAY!"

-LEVON



California where they're cooking, and he's got his dogs around while all sorts of creative ideas swirl in his head. He absolutely adores his small circle of friends and family, all of whom provide him a different kind of rejuvenation.

"I started creating art back in the late 90s. You have to understand that it's something I always wanted to do but, up to that point when I bought the ranch in '94, I'd lived a rather transient lifestyle. I travelled the world and then I got to the point where I didn't want to travel the world anymore. I wanted to settle down in one place. I wanted to find a big enough space to create art because I knew when I did start that I wasn't going to sit on the side of the road with an easel and paint pictures of mountains and flowers. I knew I wanted to go in and get nasty with it and throw sh*t around. That's what I was able to do at the ranch. That's when I started creating.

Bernie impresses the crucial importance for artists to find their own voice. He likens it to his and Elton's experience writing songs. Back in the late 60s, when they first got together, they were emulating what was currently in vogue, but it was only when they found their own voice and created something original that things started to take off. And that translates to art as well. Originally, Taupin was a little gun-shy about doing anything that had a musical connotation to it with his art because he didn't want people to think that he's in the music world and he's now taking that over to the art world. Then he became more confident and thought, 'Well, yeah. Why not?'

Taupin explains that there are three different Bernie personas in the art world. The first is what he calls "fan art," which he's proud of as a gift to people who love the music. However, it's not his real art. Does he feel embarrassed by it? Absolutely not because people are getting a certain amount of enjoyment and pleasure out of it.

His second identity is as the artist who has collaborated with the late legendary photographer and dear friend, Terry O'Neill. He loves this work and wants to continue to do another series.

The third Bernie is the creator of the three-dimensional assembles and collage work that he's had featured in museums. It is in this capacity where he'd like to change things up for something new. The problem? At the moment, the 74-year-old is unsure what that looks like, "Funnily enough, as we sit here today, I think I'm at the point now where I'm in flux about what I want to do next. This is where I'm looking for a new voice in myself. I want to do something different now, but I don't know what it is. I'm in a quandary because I don't have studio right now. The studio I had got sold. As we speak, I'm looking for a new creative avenue and a new creative space." When he's creating art, he's usually blasting music. So, what kind of music is Bernie Taupin rattling the walls with and listening to these days? "I'm a jazz nut.

It's all I listen to. Paul Desmond. Cannonball Adderley. Duke Ellington. (Count) Basie. I love Coleman Hawkins. In my estimation, Louis Armstrong is the greatest musician of the 20th century. I've always said that when I'm on my deathbed, I want them to be playing *My Favorite Things* by John Coltrane. I don't listen to pop music, and I don't listen to much classic rock, but I love traditional country and rural blues. Chicago blues. Hill country blues."

So, there you go. You'll marry a music man. If you're with Bernie, expect to be chillin' out to some jazz. But when he's writing, it's a completely different scene. "When I'm creating a lyrical body of work, it's very quiet because it's all coming from inside and it's my own space and I'm messing around on a guitar getting ideas. It all comes from the imagination and it's very simple. You wake up and you have an idea. In my memoir, I said that there are thousands of words that have been written about Jackson Pollock's drip paintings. You know what? The guy just woke up one morning and said, 'I've got a good idea.' And that's it. He just said, 'F*@k yeah. What if I just get cans of paint and do this?' You can explain it until you have a hole in your head, but that's what happened."

Then Taupin adds, "The unfortunate thing for me is that I never really sleep because my mind never turns off. I dream concurrently all night, you know? I'm always thinking, and my mind is overloaded and I'm always looking for that same idea that Jackson Pollock had or anyone of that era. It's like Warhol. He was great. He was such a dim bulb, but he had such a great concept and idea of things. I love the fact that when people asked Andy Warhol, 'What are you trying to say here?' he'd reply, 'What does it mean to you?' That's what art is all about. It's not about your idea. It's how people imagine it should be, and that's much more interesting to me. I don't want to spend my life explaining my work. I want people to go to school on it and use their imagination."

Cameron Crowe's beautiful film, *Almost Famous*, featured a high school boy in the early 1970s who's been tasked with writing an article for *Rolling Stone Magazine* on an up-and-coming rock band. In arguably the movie's most unforgettable scene, hard feelings on the band's bus were squashed when everyone spontaneously joined in on a sing-along to *Tiny Dancer*. It has become an indelible, heartwarming moment in cinematic history and the star of it is the hit song from 1971. Bernie and Elton's music has been peppering the industry for decades and Bernie, for one, couldn't be prouder.

"I am not precious about the way our music is treated or created in different environments," he admits, while an assortment of bracelets hangs from his right wrist holding his glass of water. "When you write a song, it's like giving birth to a child, but you have to eventually let that child go. I love the fact that our music is generational and that it goes on and on while finding new perpetrators to work it into some-

thing new. I'm very proud of that. I think our songs are kind of like the great American song book, which people keep reinterpreting. Why? Because they're great songs."

And then, for good measure, Bernie shares, "As I've always said, I don't like being termed a songwriter because 'songwriter' is 100 percent. It's music and lyrics and I don't do that. I'm half a songwriter. I call myself a writer, but my favorite terminology for myself is a storyteller, and that translates to the art too."

As *Jessica* by The Allman Brothers Band jams lightly through the speakers above us, I put Bernie on the spot, "Could you write a song right now about sitting here with me for this interview? What would the song be about?"

With a grin and a sudden assignment, he dives in, "It would be about those three women over there," as he motions with his head to the trio across the bar from us. "These women are longtime friends, I'm sure. I'd write about the attitude of the bartender and that little white dog out on the patio. It's like that whole concept of those giant turntables at parties where they take pictures of people standing on them as they go around."

Taupin continues with the kind of genuine thoughts that I find absolutely fascinating to hear, while also feeling a bit privileged that he's sharing them, "I have such a fanatical interest in what people look like, what they're doing, and where I think they're from. When I go to the airport and sit in the departure lounge, I'm the only person who's not looking at their phone because I'm looking at them looking at their phone. I'll see some guy walk by and there's something about him that's a little bit different. He'll be wearing appalling clothing and looks tired and worn out while dragging his whole life along with him. These are the people who fascinate the hell out of me."

He then admits, "It's really easy for me to do...and that lady is coming around here now." Wait. What? Bernie called it. One of the three women from across the bar has walked over to us and is now standing in front of him.

Bernie: "Hello. We were just talking about you."

Woman: "You were? I know I'm going to get in trouble for this.

Are you Bernie Taupin?

Bernie: "Yes I am, ma'am."

Woman: "Oh my God. My girlfriends are going to die."

Bernie: "You're very sweet. Thank you."

He would take pictures with her and her friends and, after they left, Taupin asked the bartender if they'd paid their bill yet. They had not, so Bernie picked up their tab.

From walking me through the elements of the song that I asked him to create out of thin air, to his interaction with some starry-eyed, day drinking admirers from across the bar, consider my mind blown. It was like watching Arnold Palmer mix lemonade and iced tea right in front of you.

"Dang! That's a long car!" Bernie's attention has shifted to a white stretch limo that has stopped in front of the hotel. "I didn't think they made those anymore," he says with a laugh.

He and Elton in a limo must have been a sight to be seen. I start to wonder how many limos Taupin has been in. I have no idea. But one thing I am certain about is that, while they still make limousines, they sure as hell don't make Bernie Taupins anymore.



**"WHILE MONA LISAS AND MAD HATTERS
SONS OF BANKERS, SONS OF LAWYERS
TURN AROUND AND SAY GOOD MORNING TO THE NIGHT
FOR UNLESS THEY SEE THE SKY
BUT THEY CAN'T AND THAT IS WHY
THEY KNOW NOT IF IT'S DARK OUTSIDE OR LIGHT"
-MONA LISAS AND MAD HATTERS**