

BACK TRACKS ...

Recording: BIG BANG THEORY

Artist: STYX

Drummer / Percussionist: TODD SUCHERMAN



The latest release from Styx, **BIG BANG THEORY**, is a collection of 14 songs, in which 13 are cover songs from different artists, and a remake of one of their biggest hits, *Blue Collar Man*. Todd Sucherman, drummer and percussionist, has been recording and performing with the band since recording *Lady "95"* for the Styx *Greatest Hits* release.

CD: *Blue Collar Man*, the final song on the cd, was actually the first song to be recorded. Why the remake?

TS: James Young had become friends with Marie Dixon, Willie Dixon's widow, who runs the Blues Heaven Foundation out of the old Chess Records at 2120 South Michigan Ave. in Chicago. JY had the idea that it might be fun to set-up and record there. It would be only the second recording that had taken place there in 30 years. We didn't know what it was going to be used for, but we went in and did it. We had Johnnie Johnson, who was Chuck Berry's original keyboard player, and Koko Taylor join us. We did a couple of songs, one being a slow, swampy, bluesy version of *Blue Collar Man*. It was pretty magical to be in the hallowed room where Chuck Berry recorded many of his famous pieces. Howlin' Wolf, Willie Dixon, and the Rolling Stones recorded there also.

CD: How did this evolve into the record?

TS: We were invited to play at Eric Clapton's Crossroads Festival in Dallas, June of 2004. Styx had played Dallas with the regular show two weeks prior, and we were only going to play 45 minutes. Instead of coming back with the same songs, we decided to play cover songs and just have fun. One of the songs was *I Am The Walrus*. We had so much fun playing it, that it found its way into our regular set, for the encore. A couple of months later, Greg Solk, program director for WLUP in Chicago, asked for a live recording of the song. A live recording was made and sent. Long story short, over the next few months it was added to over 400 radio stations. At that point, Universal Music asked us to do a whole record of covers. That was how the whole thing started.

CD: How did you approach the recording sessions?

TS: There was tremendous pressure to get my parts done quickly, as the label wanted the record as soon as possible. I had a vacation planned around this time and had to bang out the tracks fast to make the best use of time. I was able to get a majority of the tracks done in a day and a half by recording by myself with a click track. I knew the songs and arrangements well enough to record in that unconventional manor. This way the guys could overdub their parts while I was away on my trip. I was in the hot seat and every track was a first take. It was a challenge because you want it to have a *live* feel. You have to shape the songs dynamically and give it punch and energy while basically reacting to your imagination and a click.

CD: What kit was used for the tracks?

TS: For *Walrus* and *Blue Collar* I used my live kit, which is a Pearl

Masterworks. For the LA sessions, I used a Pearl Masters kit- 10", 12", 14", 16", 22" bass drum. That's a smaller set than I use with the band on the road. I used a different snare on each tune to change the vibe of the track. Snares that made the record were a C&C Craviotto Abalone, a Stanbridge, a Pearl solid rosewood Masterworks and Ultracast, a Black Beauty, a NSMD Deluxe, a Dunnett Titanium, and a few others.

CD: *Manic Depression* and *One Way Out* are drum standouts. Were these tracks part of the day and a half drum session.

TS: Yes, for *One Way Out*, I thought, "How am I going to try to emulate the sound of the two drummers who played on the original track." It ended up being one of my favorite tracks on the record. We had played it only once at a soundcheck to see if it'd work. We had played *Manic Depression* live a few times so those were both fun tracks to blow on. I was thinking "Tony/Vinnie" on *Manic* and it's my tip of the hat to them. Again, playing by myself gave me the opportunity to tweak and punch in but I opted not to do that. I wanted it spontaneous and live feeling.

CD: *BIG BANG THEORY* is the best charting Styx record in 15 years. How does that make you feel?

TS: Really great. Covering songs like *I Can See For Miles*, *Can't Find My Way Home*, *I Don't Need No Doctor* were so much fun. I'm privileged to be in a band that plays as well as they do. We weren't trying to reinvent the wheel with these songs on this record, but really more to honor them. I think the spirit of fun and reverence for the music comes through to the listener and that's what's important. And for me to play these songs thinking about all the great original drummers was really inspiring. It was a fun project and we had a good time making the record. It was exciting to see the whole thing materialize so quickly.

Websites of interest:

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