



Biography

February 1988

## TONIO K.

**Y**ou figure it out.

Look, it's not that we don't want to be helpful. It's just that, like other human endeavors fraught with uncertainty, trying to describe the music of Tonio (Not His Real Name) K. ranks right up there with the quest for world peace and the perfect dry martini. We could, of course, suggest you skip the fine print and proceed directly to Notes From The Lost Civilization, the mercurial Mr. K.'s latest long player for A&M Records. But then, we wouldn't be doing our job, now, would we?

We could go on, of course, about songs that start out personal and end up universal; about cultural manifestos that transform themselves into pleas for love and warmth and surrender; about big moments of truth pivoting on the smallest, most sharply observed, details. But there's a whole here that's decidedly larger than the sum of its parts.

Luckily, we're not alone. For years critics have tripped over their own superlatives trying to pin down the music of Tonio K. "An arousing original," was what Rolling Stone declared. "The funniest serious songwriter in America," ventured Stereo Review, fusing opposites with Zen-like finesse.

Similarly, history, in cases such as K., is little help. We could fill you in on the early years when he apprenticed as "the kid" playing bass in a mid-'70s touring version of Buddy Holly's old stalwarts, The Crickets. We could direct your attention to a series of groundbreaking solo albums, beginning with 1979's Life In The Foodchain and continuing through to last year's much-acclaimed Romeo Unchained. We could, with a flourish, present a string of prime cuts, fiery theme music for the fading glow of the 20th Century -- K. originals such as "H-A-T-R-E-D," "Say Goodbye," "Mars Needs Women," "I Handle Snakes," "Impressed," "Funky Western Civilization," "Perfect World" or last year's alternative radio anthem "I'm Supposed To Have Sex With You."

Or we could impress you with the lengthy list of heavy-hitters guesting on Notes From The Lost Civilization -- everyone from the estimable T-Bone Burnett (who executive produced the album) to Booker T. Jones, Charlie Sexton, Billy Vera and Peter Case. We might even mention such studio greats as Jim Keltner, James Jamerson Jr. and Raymond Pounds. Or we could wax effusive about the new single, "Without Love," the upcoming video and the impending tour.

We could even quiz the artist himself on cuts from Notes and discover that

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"Without Love" is "...just another letter about the relative importance of love in the world" and "Children's Crusade," is a "...self-explanatory time travelogue." "Stay," K. tells us, is "...a new angle on an old theme set to the original music." "City Life" describes "...the actual view from our house," while "You Were There," is, thank you very much, "...too personal to talk about." "The Executioner's Song" could be about "...anyone from P.T. Barnum to Adnan Khashoggi to the devil himself" (and, according to Booker T. "feels just like a bunch of people playing together live in the '60s"). "I Can't Stand It," we are assured, is "...authentic urban surf music," while "What Women Want" and "I Can't Stop" are "...a feminist manifesto and a manly electronic mating call" respectively. Finally "Where Is That Place" (which inspired the title and cover art for Notes From The Lost Civilization) is confirmed as being "...an exercise in looking back at the future."

Let's face it: we could do it all -- display his fingerprints, tour his home town, interview his 6th grade math teacher, rummage through his garbage, peek through his window or tap his phone -- but we'd just end up with the same puzzled look on our face.

Which brings us back to the naked truth: There are some things man is not meant to describe. Simply enjoy. There, we've done our duty; now you do yours. Turn it on, tune it in and play it loud.