

**DON RICARDO'S NEWS FROM THE HIGH RHINE /
A PARTY AT THE SPRITZWERK MERCURIO / JUNE 2013**

The moment came shortly before my return from Texas. It came with near transcendent clarity and the growing awareness that I had a new tool at hand. One morning I found I could see what was important, and what was not. At a glance I recognized situations where my energy might be put to good use, and those where it was pointless; which pointed to the true path, and which was maya, or illusion. Oh Boy, I thought: I could live here. The beauty of the feeling came with the serenity it conveyed, of being able to choose and trust my choices. I suppose there are masters out there who can stay in that place. While I practiced my newfound lick so I wouldn't forget, the illumination cast its glow for only a few days. It may have come with the euphoria and excitement that swept over me seeing two new records almost through to completion.

Edith was smiling when I walked out into the arrivals building at the Zürich airport, Tuesday, May 28th. Gone six weeks, it felt good to be back from my travels. Avoiding the Autobahn, she drove us home by back roads and I drank in the countryside. She helped me lug my bag upstairs, overloaded and full of goodies. I stumbled around unpacking Mexican spices—Fiesta Brand chili powder and comino, Tony Chachere's Creole Seasoning, vitamins, aspirin, a votive candle with the image of Pancho Villa, Gran General Revolucionario. From the Elgin H.E.B. store I had a plastic sack full of jalapeños and two ten-packs of fresh flower tortillas. (Old El Paso brand tortillas are available in Switzerland, but they disappoint). I had books, cards, and an assortment of body lotions for Edith. I even brought back a half-dozen LPs from way, way back: original copies of *The Big Taste*, my second record, released thirty-four years ago in 1979. Now, I had just returned from finishing my twenty-first, *Here in the Garden*, produced with Thomm Jutz in Nashville, and due for a release later this year on Brambus Records. Waiting in the wings, we have another record, a collection of Gulf Coast songs I've been working on with my Texas friends and band mates.

By the time I finished unpacking, Edith had to leave to go babysit grandkids. I took a shower to wash the airport off of me and collapsed on the sofa. Down with jetlag the next couple of days, I didn't try to schedule a band rehearsal before our gig Saturday in Altnau, about an hour away on Lake Constance. The gig was a private party celebrating the 70th birthday of Enzo Mercurio, who is married to Edith's sister Regina. It would be a low-pressure event, and I felt sure we would do okay. I trusted my newfound equanimity.

Rain and colder weather had set in the day after I got home. It was raining still when we drove to the gig—Enzo's shop, a large, cavernous building with cement floors—Peter, our guitarist, and Hans-Ruedi, our bass player, already had the PA set up. They said I wouldn't need to set up my small system I had brought along to use as an amp. I would be able hear over the mains, they said. The place was already filling, so we cut short the sound check.

Tabea, our singer barely made the gig. With her husband Tom in the hospital with blood poisoning, her cellar underwater from the rains, two kids at home and another on the way—and she was headed down to Milan to start a new record the next day. I would not have blamed her

for wanting to cancel. Edith had interceded, sweetening the deal. She had already been on the phone with Regina arranging for someone to pick up the drums for Andy, who would be coming by train from his job at the music store in Zürich. He would miss the first set. I was prepared to play the gig without drums. I told myself I would play the gig alone if it had to be, but unannounced, my Olympian calm was slipping away.

The sound in the hall must have been better than it was on stage. It was a company party, for friends and family, and Enzo's colleagues. Seated at long tables, people were eating and drinking, no one paying much attention to the music. The first two sets went well enough, without too much adjustment time after Andy came. We played a lot of cover songs. I berated myself for not hooking up my own sound. I could barely hear myself through the main speakers, or Tabea. Andy couldn't hear us either. Allowing the others to make a decision for me, I had failed to spot the important thing, losing my serenity in the bargain. But a good band will carry on, and we did. Tabea had to leave after the second set, and I had to reach down pretty far for the third. While we failed to sell any CDs, we received a number of compliments after the show, and I was happy with our performance.

As it turned out, two of the band members were headed to Italy the next day: Tabea to Milan, and Hans-Ruedi to Palermo, Sicily. He had been there the week before on a cruise. Frustrated by having to return to the ship with no time to explore, he simply decided to book a ticket and return on his own. I wondered if this Italy thing held any portent for the rest of us and decided it didn't. We packed our gear and made goodbyes. Edith doesn't like to drive after dark, but she knew the way, and there was still enough light, with the sky beginning to clear to the west as we headed home. I nodded off in the passenger seat, only awakening when we pulled into Diessenhofen.

I'm hoping to find that clarity again. Apparently the first illumination is free; after that you have to work to get back to the source. As I write, the master for the new record is on its way in the post. The sun has returned over the past few days, and it's beginning to feel more like summer here on the High Rhine. Edith and I have been out in the garden every day. I had loosened the ground and spread compost before I left back in April. She did a great job in the weeks I was gone, making beds and planting. We're harvesting salad greens and radishes. After a shaky start owing to the cold weather, the garden is about to explode. I look forward to Rhine swimming when the water warms up next month, ever a high point of the year.

Here's wishing everyone a wonderful summer. I'll be following up with some news soon concerning our new Brambus release, as well as upcoming book news.

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