



Bio information: **GARY LUCAS' FLEISCHEREI [FEATURING SARAH STILES]**

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Cuneiform promotion dept: (301) 589-8894 / fax (301) 589-1819

email: joyce [-at-] cuneiformrecords.com (Press & world radio); radio [-at-] cuneiformrecords.com (North American & world radio)

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ / MUSICAL

**Prodigious American Guitar Explorer, Captain Beefheart Alumnus & Pop Culture/Film Archeologist
GARY LUCAS**

Revives the Street-Smart, Playful Music of Classic 1930s Cartoons with the Tribute

MUSIC FROM MAX FLEISCHER CARTOONS

Featuring Broadway & Off-Broadway Vocal Sensation SARAH STILES

Capturing the Playfully Erotic Spirit of Betty Boop and Mischievous Energy of Olive Oyl

Gary Lucas is one of the great spelunkers of contemporary culture, a fearless explorer who delves into forgotten and overlooked crevices and returns bearing exquisite treasures. His latest project *Music from Max Fleischer Cartoons* is a particularly spectacular find, a gleaming confection from a hurly-burly era when the **Jazz Age** crashed into the **Great Depression** and **Tin Pan Alley** borrowed shamelessly from **Harlem**. A 2016 **Cuneiform** release, the album features songs from **Fleischer Studios** cartoons originally delivered by actress **Mae Questel**, who provided the voice and vocals for two beloved but very different characters: the eternally sexy **Betty Boop** and Popeye's sometime 'goilfriend' **Olive Oyl**.

A breathtaking guitarist whose dauntingly eclectic career encompasses a formative stint with **Captain Beefheart**, a crucial collaboration with **Jeff Buckley**, and an abiding passion for film scoring (just for starters), Lucas enlisted trombonist/arranger **Joe Fiedler** to craft zingy, kinetic and historically grounded arrangements for **Sarah Stiles**, a fiercely intelligent actor and singer best known for her work on and **Off Broadway** (in *Hand to God* and *Avenue Q*, respectively). Loose-limbed and girlish, sensuous and soulful, Stiles taps into the raw, unsentimental energy that animated **Max Fleischer's** angsty animation, which provided a street-smart East Coast alternative to **Walt Disney's** California confections.

"Fleischer's animation has a gritty, funky urban sensibility that feeds right into **R. Crumb**," Lucas says. "His cartoons had that **Jewish** and urban wiseguy sensibility. There's a dark, black humor associated with **Eastern European** immigrants, and even though I'm from upstate, those are my roots. Betty Boop in particular embodies a knowing sophistication emanating out of **Times Square**, which was a node of melting pot culture where Broadway, Yiddish theater, and jazz all converged."

Fiedler brought in a brilliant group of players for the project. **Jeff Lederer** is a supremely versatile saxophonist who can be found playing salsa with trombonist **Jimmy Bosch** and raucous post-bop with drummer **Matt Wilson**. **Michael Bates**, a virtuoso bassist with nine albums under his own name, has delved deeply into cutting edge jazz and soul, while drummer **Rob Garcia** is also an acclaimed bandleader and composer who's at the center of Brooklyn's vibrant jazz scene.

Casting the cats was the easy part. Finding a singer who could capture the insouciant spirit of Mae Questel while comfortably inhabiting the material proved far more difficult. Lucas turned to his wife **Caroline Sinclair**, a New York City casting director, who said, "why don't you let me cast this one?" "That was a good idea," Lucas says. "Sarah is really a bundle of fire who can do it all. It was crucial to find a singer who wouldn't try to hijack the idea and make it about her. We conceived this as a tribute to Mae Questel and the Fleischers. This is about trying to spread **Fleischermania**."

Part of what makes Stiles such a perfect fit for the material is the way she captures the spirit of the characters. It's immediately obvious when she's singing a song associated with the effervescent Ms. Boop and when she's donning the slippery guise of Ms. Oyl. The album opens and closes with bits lifted from Fleischer productions. Lucas himself raises the curtain, crooning a brief bit of silliness on "**Sweet Betty**," which is followed by Stiles' winning rendition of the Boopsters' theme song "**Don't Take My Boop-Oop-a-Doop Away**" (we wouldn't dream of it Betty). She gives such a sly and sultry sheen to another Boop vehicle, "**That's My Weakness Now**," that it's hard to understand why it didn't become a standard.

Some of Betty Boop's numbers did make it into the pop pantheon, particularly, "**Penthouse Serenade**," which opens as a touching recitative before turning into a roiling rent party ("that's instrumental music we lifted straight off the cartoon soundtrack," Lucas says). She's beyond charming on the beguilingly goofy "**The Music Goes Round and Round**" and so forthrightly amorous on "**Do Something**" it's no wonder that the prudes enforcing the Hays Code were determined to hide her shimmying boop-oop-a-doop under a bushel.

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Stiles slips effortlessly into Olive Oyl's considerable shoes on her bump-and-grind anti-hirsute anthem **"I Want a Clean Shaven Man"** and the can't-we-all-get-along plea **"Brotherly Love"** (two numbers that are clearly ripe for revival). The album closes with a vivid and hilarious recreation of the soundtrack for the classic 1935 cartoon **"Beware of Barnacle Bill,"** where Popeye and Bill vie for the affections of the resilient Oyl.

Hewing closely to the original scores, Lucas and his crew summon a lost world of rent parties and Yiddish music halls, Vaudeville emporiums, Broadway revues, and even klezmer dance parties (themes often written by **Fleischer Studios** mainstay **Sammy Timberg**). Lucas actually took an earlier stab at some of this music, creating a solo National guitar medley of Popeye and Betty Boop tunes for his 1998 **Tzadik** album ***Busy Being Born*** under the title of **"Fleischerei"** (which is German for butcher shop, word play evoking the cartoons' raucous, irreverent sensibility).

As an artist who thrives by keeping dozens of projects spinning at any given time, Lucas credits Fiedler with moving *Fleischerei* from the back burner to the front. He had mentioned the idea to the trombonist about a decade ago as they worked on two albums for Cuneiform with **Fast N' Bulbous: The Captain Beefheart Project**. When their paths crossed about two years ago, Fiedler brought up the Fleischer concept, noting that his day job as music director for **Sesame Street** left him ideally situated to tackle the project.

"That was the immediate spur," Lucas says. "I've got a guy with the perfect skill set. I'm a classically trained musician and can read but I don't write out music when I don't have to. I prefer to do everything as head arrangements, but this needed a real arranger's touch. Independent of Joe I figured out guitar arrangements in the original keys, to keep the flavor of the songs."

In many ways, *Fleischerei* is the latest dispatch from Lucas's lifetime affair with the moving image. Growing up in Syracuse, he would rent silent 8-mm copies of classic Universal horror films and screen them for neighborhood kids ("I had a piggybank filled with nickels and dimes," he recalls). He made his own stop-motion animated shorts, and by the time he was in high school got hired for a gig scored an animated film about DNA created for biology classes. His budding career as a director screeched to a halt when he enrolled at **Yale**, which then didn't offer any filmmaking courses. But over the course of his exuberantly creative journey in music, he's never lost his acute case of cinephilia.

Still, summing up Lucas's kaleidoscopic career is a daunting task by any measure. He's got a project for every day of the week, and three on Sunday. He composes soundtracks for television and film, and can often be found performing his scores live, including the classic 1934 Chinese silent feature *The Goddess* and the Brazilian cult classic *This Night I Will Possess Your Corpse*. Not surprisingly given his Castle-haunted youth he's demonstrated a particular affinity for horror films, creating acclaimed scores for **Carl Theodor Dreyer's** classic 1932 *Vampyr*, a Spanish-language version of **Tod Browning's** immortal version of *Dracula*, and **James Whale's** definitive *Frankenstein* (both from 1931).

Famously dubbed "the thinking man's guitar hero" by *The New Yorker*, Lucas first made his mark in the early 1980s with the last incarnation of **Captain Beefheart's Magic Band**, an association that continued fruitfully after **Don Van Vliet's** retirement from music. He collaborated with the lamented legend **Jeff Buckley**, contributing incisive guitar work and two songs to the epochal 1994 album *Grace* (including the title track). More recently, he's released *Otherworld* (**Esoteric/Cherry Red Records**); a duo collaboration with UK vocalist **Peter Hammill**; and a project with Hungarian jazz-rock ensemble **DeBORT**.

With *Fleischerei*, Lucas has created a particularly vivid and entrancing realm, a musical world that's uncannily familiar, utterly original and tantalizingly foreign like only the past can be.

For more information on Gary Lucas' Fleischerei:

www.garylucas.com/www/fleischerei – www.cuneiformrecords.com

GARY LUCAS' FLEISCHEREI – BAND MEMBER WEBSITES:

Gary Lucas - acoustic guitar, guitar arrangements, vocals - www.garylucas.com

Sarah Stiles - lead vocals - twitter and instagram as @Lulubellestiles

Joe Fiedler - trombone, ensemble arrangements - www.joefiedler.com

Jeff Lederer - woodwinds, vocals - www.littleimusic.com

Michael Bates - acoustic bass - www.outsidesources.org/bio/

Rob Garcia - drums - www.brooklynjazz.org/musicians.php?id=5

PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS

Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available on the Gary Lucas' Fleischerei artist page @ www.cuneiformrecords.com

