

“Shoot for the moon and if you miss you will still be among the stars”

Vancouver based singer-songwriter & screenwriter Pennan Brae could be a living vestige that the above quote is absolutely true. While working on his fourth album, he took an artistic turn he couldn't have expected, leading him in a surprise direction that ended up fulfilling many of his ambitions. As a performer, Pennan constantly challenges himself to not only grow musically, but to take risks. In doing so, he has created a work he is incredibly proud of, establishing himself as a truly independent artist.

“As a kid, I was fascinated by pictures of the planets, solar system and galaxies,” says Pennan. “The space picture books of the 1970s really captured this. It was the tail end of the NASA moon landing missions and there were so many books for kids to read. The colour of the pages and pictures; I don't know what was in their ink, but the illustrations seemed so majestic.” With this in mind, Pennan's goal for the album cover – at that time called *Midnight Reverie* – was going to be fairly straightforward, with him dressed in a space suit standing in the countryside underneath a full moon. While riffing about ideas, photographer Dan Jackson suggested Pennan hold an old ladder so it looked like he was going to climb up to the moon. Pennan immediately changed the name of the album to *THE ASTRONOT*, and the seed was planted for another idea...but more on that later.

*THE ASTRONOT* was recorded at Blue Light Studio in Vancouver with Producer Kaj Falch-Nielsen, with additional sessions taking place in Los Angeles with renowned drummer Steve Ferrone (Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers, Duran Duran, Eric Clapton) and INXS bassist Garry Gary Beers. “Hearing Steve Ferrone lay down the drums and Garry Gary Beers adding bass on “Walk with Me” and “Crashland” is the highlight of my career. When I was younger, I used to watch Steve drum on Eric Clapton's *24 Nights at the Royal Albert Hall*, which I had on VHS. With Garry, I was a big INXS fan in high school. They are an original band with an original sound and one of the all-time greats.” Composer and producer Eric Alexandrakis served as a mentor and one of the producers on *THE ASTRONOT*, and it was he who brought in Steve and Garry. “Working with Steve and Garry is such an honour. These are my musical heroes, it still hasn't fully sunk in that I had the chance to record with them.”

Producer Kirk Kelsey (Creed) joined the crew, working with Pennan to make magic on the mix. “Kirk has such a wonderful touch and sensitivity on the tracks. His mixes gave the album a cinematic feel.”

*THE ASTRONOT & GRAVITY* (Pennan's 5th album release) was mastered by Grammy Award winning engineer Sean Magee (The Beatles Remasters, Pink Floyd, U2) at his home Studio, Abbey Road (“hallowed ground to me”), and, for the first time, Pennan recorded with several instruments he'd never used before, adding violin, cello, mandolin, pedal steel guitar and banjo in to the orchestration. The songwriting was equally important. “I usually write alone, I kind of like to be in a quiet, dimly lit room and just start banging away. Writing lyrics is hard, sometimes

you write something amazing, other times you don't, and you just have to keep at it. The lyrics on THE ASTRONOT cover a variety of universal topics: loneliness, longing and love.”

Not unlike the books Pennan read as a child, THE ASTRONOT has a 70's feel, with piano led tracks and a take-the-top-down-go-for-a-ride vibe. Standout tracks include “Walk With Me,” a 3:12 second rocking stomper, “Crashland,” with its wicked guitar riff and Kinks-like touch, the very groovy “Goin’ Down,” featuring cello by David Peters, taking the song in a luminous direction and “If I Lose You,” a gorgeous tune with a shimmering harmonica break. The otherworldly “Crashland Dream” completes the album with its buzzy, spacey sound.

Along with the ear-worm worthy tracks, incredible guest performers and deft instrumentation, there's something else to THE ASTRONOT; while shooting the cover Pennan was struck with the idea to make a feature length movie, also called THE ASTRONOT, with his music serving as the soundtrack. “(Photographer) Dan made the suggestion that I should hold a rickety old ladder and from that moment I had the idea of a character who longed to be an astronaut but was inhibited in some way.” Anyone who is familiar with Pennan's first three albums won't be entirely surprised at this path, since his popular YouTube channel features music videos that have gotten upward of 25,000 views.

Mostly THE ASTRONOT was the opportunity for the progress and change that Pennan Brae had been looking for. “This release is special because it represents growth. We tried many different arrangements and recorded with different instruments and musicians. It certainly feels like a departure from my earlier three albums. My goal was to write an album instead of a group of separate singles. I wanted this record to flow from song 1 to song 11, and I think we did that. I hope that listeners enjoy hearing it unfold.”