

CD Review: Mike Gendron's *The Day That I Give Birth*



Don't you hate when you see someone on TV, or even worse, on the street, and can't quite place from where you know them? We start running through the alphabet in our head, hoping to hit upon their name. We flip through our cerebral Rolodex. Maybe we went to school with them? Maybe they work in our office... maybe we were in the service together... college? JAIL!??

I went through those same machinations when I first set sight on *The Day That I Give Birth*, the new CD by Mike Gendron. I knew that I had seen/heard this guy before, and then it hit me. OF COURSE I know him! Not only was he with perennial local favorites GrandEvolution, but he's the "Mike G" behind Mike G & Associates (both of whom I've covered for *Motif* in past columns).

In fact (with apologies to the late Godfather of Soul), Mike Gendron just might be the hardest working man in show business. Well at least in RI. In between recording this original material, for which he plays almost all of the instruments (more on that later) Gendron boasts residency in not one but TWO popular tribute bands (a John Lennon act called Lennon Live, and the Neil Young tribute "Young Rust," which Gendron fronts). Not bad for a kid who made his bones playing gigs at The Living Room at the tender age of 15.

A few moments into a deep listening of *The Day That I Give Birth*, it becomes amply apparent exactly from where Mike Gendron culls his songwriting influence. While much of the music throughout is deep driving rock & roll, his lyrics expose a poetry that often leans toward the surreal. The title track alone repeatedly reveals Gendron's unconditioned ability to turn quite the thought-provoking phrase: "Fault lines crack where lava flows deep beneath the earth... Spiders raise and eat their young, they're boiling in the pot... Let me paint you gold so you can shine."

The acoustic folk ballad "Universus" sparingly utilizes a Neil Young strumming style and borrows melodically from Bob Dylan's "With God On Our Side." That said, Gendron unabashedly displays his vulnerable side by calling out to some higher power for guidance and strength to face an unknown future: "My path has been laid out before my blinded eyes to see. Somewhere deep into the fog is who I'm supposed to be. I can't cut through this haze. Guide me through this treacherous, all consuming maze."

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the final, somewhat disturbing track, "Anonymous." What can only be described as the "Revolution 9" of the album, an ominous backing track plays over the recorded voicemail message of a very disturbed woman. With wailing guitars, she's heard claiming the government has targeted her for assassination, which will come about by the explosive device they previously implanted in her head. Unfortunately her near-whisper is practically inaudible, and had it not been for an explanation detailed in the album's press kit, I wouldn't know what I was listening to. Frankly, unlike The White Album's "Revolution 9", "Anonymous" does nothing for what up to that point had been a strong body of work.

That small point aside *The Day That I Give Birth* excels as an example of Mike Gendron's ample gifts as a singer-songwriter. The disc was engineered by famed member of The Schemers, Emerson Torrey. And based on this output of work, Mike Gendron has earned his deserved spot alongside Torrey, and Mark Cutler, and all the other best songwriters Rhode Island has to offer.