

The Burdens

Words by Jeff Breeze

Photo by Art Evans



"We were married for a long time before we figured out a way to play together," Karin Stack says. Stack, who had played classical piano says, "I couldn't figure out how that intersected with what (her husband) Richard (Scullin) does, so he bought me a drum kit. The skills translated pretty easily between the instruments." With a husband playing music finding a way to play together created a band, and one with a positively matrimonial moniker, the Burdens.

Richard Scullin says, "I write most of the songs, so that act provides a creative direction, one that for better or worse sets a course for the initial things." Though he admits "Karin calls b.s. on sappy stuff I can on occasion write." Songwriting is a constant process and getting together to play is often quite impromptu. "It's - of course - easier to get the band together," Scullin claims, "I'll be playing, and Karin will wander into the room and

play for a few songs, and then drift out, check on something else she's working on." "We don't have to schedule practices or anything," Stack adds.

Working as a duo the band can interact in ways that a full band can only rarely do. "With just two people," Stack says, "it's a really direct give-and-take. Because I hear the music from the very first seeds of an idea, and through the entire evolution, I can jump right in when I think it's developed enough to take a drum part. I'll tell him to go back to an earlier idea, stuff like that. It's much more agile and organic than a full band."

Sometimes the sound of a band seems to leave a space in their songs and contributors can fill those spots, but none permanently. "I frequently wish we had a steady bass player," Stack says, "but they'd have to live with us. We attempted to breed one." Their daughter Hazel went to a Radiohead / Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks concert in Montreal at 3 months old. "We'll see, in about 10 years."

Being partners in both a marriage and a band can present unusual challenges, but for the Burdens, it's nothing that can't be lifted with sound. "There have been times when we've been stressed for any many of reasons, and so, it has been difficult to play, yet playing seems to prevail, even if it's just a few songs after dinner," Scullin says "And yes, there have been times when I have been angry and don't want to talk, but then I think, 'Damn, I need my drummer.' I think we're closer because of it." Stack thinks the reason for their lack of divisiveness is even simpler, "I'm pretty new to my instrument, so I don't come at it with as much ego as a lot of people in bands. We don't have the stormy clashes some bands have."

Working with just two people does leave enough of a sounding board for ideas that can give a whole new perspective on things. For Scullin, the biggest stumbling block was words. "There seems to be a center of the song, a group of words that captures the thingness of it," Scullin claims. "I often write songs with just a few lyrics, songs like 'I am Missing,' with three words, yet they work, I hope. Karin liberated me when she noted that not all songs necessarily need verses and verses of lyrics, and not all songs need strict structures. My misconception had been holding me back, and I wasn't making the songs I heard because I figured they weren't 'correct.'" Stack who finds herself in the position of backing band found Scullin's direction helped her where she too was most stuck. "Richard has liberated me by maybe not encouraging but definitely embracing the imperfections and discouraging my feeble attempts at sounding like a drum machine. That's the other great thing about playing together constantly and recording live -- tempo changes are imperceptible and natural " That's the way the synergy flows in the music of the Burdens, it all seems so natural.