

Island Sixteen - The Severed Head of Orpheus Still Sings (Part 2)

(Extract from: *Muse of the Long Haul - Thirty-One Isles of the Creative Imagination*)



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Images: Various Interstitium (band) images by Ian Irvine 2014-2022, also a collage of the brandings of a number of the radio stations Interstitium’s songs have been played at.

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Orpheus Dismembered

I’ve loved music all my life, and have written songs constantly since my teens—over 250 (as at December 2022), but the necessities and pressures involved in making a living (supporting children) and establishing bodies of work in other writing disciplines reached a head in the mid-90s. On top of these pressures, I had to face a situation in which the band idea I’d poured my heart and soul into, from both song-writing and performance perspectives, became alienated from me. In late 1993 and early 1994, the four remaining members of *Goya’s Child* (Original line-up) moved to take over all aspects of the band, including seizing and then trademarking the band’s name, which I’d used for an ongoing recording project featuring my brother, sister-in-law and former partner for 3 years prior to meeting any of the members of the later ‘*Goya’s Child*’. There was also the problem of the joint copyright ownership of around 38 songs and song fragments.

Although we had submitted signed lyric sheet documents for stamping/dating to Bendigo police station for a number of our songs, and possessed multiple publicly distributed CDs and tapes displaying joint copyright assignments, and although I possessed almost all of the original tape recordings of our jam sessions, etc. I was put in the position of having to formerly assert my part-ownership (of lyrics and lyric melodies) over jointly created songs through an exchange of legal letters sent by our respective solicitors.

... a frenzied band
Of Thracian women, wearing skins of beasts,

From some high ridge of ground caught sight of [Orpheus].
'Look!' shouted one of them, tossing her hair
That floated in the breeze, 'Look, there he is,
That man who scorns us!' and she threw her lance
Full in Apollo's minstrel's face, but, tipped
With leaves, it left a bruise but drew no blood.
Another hurled a stone; that, in mid air,
Was vanquished by the strains of voice and lyre ...
[...] Even so
The reckless onslaught swelled; their fury knew
No bounds; stark madness reigned. And still his singing
Would have charmed every weapon, but the huge
Clamour, the drums, the curving Phrygian fifes,
Hand-clapping, Bacchic screaming drowned the lyre.
And then at last, his song unheard, his blood
Reddened the stones.¹

I do not intend to go into the full details here of what unfolded in the years and decades following 'The Severance', as I call it. In truth, after 1994 there was very little contact between myself and the other members of the band—so the situation never escalated into something more confrontational. However, suffice to say, 'The Severance' experience all but extinguished my desire to trust my musical creations to other musicians, except in situations where the legal boundaries of the relationship were formerly understood by all involved prior to a collaboration taking place. In short, any return to song-writing in casual, easy-going collaborative milieus (which is, after all, the very essence of the music world) was over, for a time, for me. I needed to learn how to place my trust in musical collaborators again.

And so, and so I must move on ...
and trust someone, as I sing my own sweet song ...

In terms of the final stages of the Orpheus myth, the years between 1994 and 2010 were the 'life support only' years for me as a musician—the years in which the 'limbs and torso fragments of Orpheus' (i.e. of *Goya's Child Original*) were strewn across both the Victorian landscape—in the form of the memories, tapes, videos, photos, gig posters, etc. preserved by fans—and also across the 35 or so cassette tapes (about 50 hours of raw original jam, practice session, radio play recordings and live gig, etc. recordings) painstakingly assembled between 1991 and 1993. In this treasure trove are dozens of versions of our key songs, as well as a record of their sometimes gradual, sometimes spectacular, development over a number of takes or jam sessions. The recordings also feature snippets of conversations between band members during jam sessions. I think it is a fascinating historic treasure trove.

Although 20 or so of the key songs had been performed live at venues across Victoria, and some had been professionally recorded in early 1993 (at, initially, a Melbourne recording studio, but ultimately at a Castlemaine studio) and subsequently played on radio stations like ABC's JJJ, many others were in a fragmented and underdeveloped state. Likewise, the great bulk had not been professionally produced/recorded at the point of my departure from the band (i.e. in late-1993 to early-1994). During this era of my life, reassembling the 'limbs and torso of Orpheus' seemed to me like a mammoth task and the 30 shared songs plus the 8 or so, at that time, significant song fragments, went into limbo/deep freeze for many years. This meant that they couldn't be used by either myself or the new version of the band in public

¹ Book XI, p. 249, of *Metamorphoses*, by Ovid, Oxford World Classics edition, 1990, Trns. A.D. Melville.

forums without serious legal and financial risk to those involved—especially if they earned money for either party.

In retrospect this was not only a very difficult period for me, but I also believe it represented the ‘death moment’ or ‘death story beat’² stage of the ‘egregor’ I’d named ‘*Goya’s Child*’ way back in the late 1980s. I say this without in any way discounting the achievements of the remaining four members of the band after my departure—it is certainly correct to say that *Goya’s Child (2)* was also a very good band. However, I had great faith in the potential of many of our unproduced songs—I could hear their true form in my mind—and from my perspective the egregor of *Goya’s Child* (all versions) under-performed from 1994 on due to the stand-off, and as a consequence songs featuring my lyrics/lyric melodies, that should have been professionally produced before circulating on radio, etc. in Australia, and maybe even globally, were left rotting on old cassette tapes. To me the situation had resonances with the following moment in the ancient story of Orpheus:

“The poet’s limbs were strewn in different places: the head and the lyre you, Hebrus, received, and (a miracle!) floating in midstream, the lyre lamented mournfully; mournfully the lifeless tongue murmured; mournfully the banks echoed in reply. And now, carried onward to the sea, they left their native river-mouth and reached the shores of Lesbos, at Methymna. Here, as the head lay exposed on the alien sand, its moist hair dripping brine, a fierce snake attacked it. But at last Phoebus came, and prevented it, as it was about to bite, and turned the serpent’s gaping jaws to stone, and froze the mouth, wide open, as it was.”³

And so things remained into the first decade of the 2000s, until, after several conversations between myself and former bass player, co-songwriter and co-vocalist for *Goya’s Child*, Liam Thorpe, something almost miraculous happened. Liam decided to initiate and secure a public declaration, via the *Goya’s Child (2)* website at Reverbnation, concerning both my co-founding and early involvement in *Goya’s Child (Original)*, as well as my shared copyright over most of the songs we’d collectively created. The statement wasn’t perfect, there were still significant issues outstanding concerning songs I’d co-written with them and that had appeared on the sound track to the internationally distributed independent movie ‘Freedom Deep’, but it is fair to say that a significant thaw in relations had occurred, and, I have to assume that the statement was agreed to by not just Liam, but also Ritchie O’Neill, Y.T. and James Mannix. For a time, it seemed that healing had occurred and that somewhere off in the distance we might be able to come together, once again, as a unit to professionally produce the final 30+ songs. Unfortunately, the untimely death of James, in late 2014, as well as the tragic passing of Liam in mid-2018, ended my own re-unification dreams.

For better or worse, I knew that I had to find a way to proceed alone to complete both the unproduced *Goya’s Child (Original)* backlog of songs, as well as over 70 of my own songs that had been accumulating over the years. As a consequence of my efforts the close to full oeuvre of *Goya’s Child (Original)* plus *Goya’s Child (2)* songs is now available for anyone to listen to at the various sites run independently by Richie and Y.T., as *Goya’s Child (2)* and myself as *Ian Irvine (Solo)* / Feat. *Goya’s Child (Original Line-up)*. This achievement should be seen as, in part, a memorial to our lost companions who were unable to partake in the final completion of the oeuvre themselves. Through my *Goya’s Child* twitter handle I

² This particular ‘story beat’ was made famous by Joseph Campbell, and later, by Christopher Vogler, as part of the age old, many-faced, ‘heroic journey’ story arc (or narrative arc) used in many traditional hero stories. The overall story arc was made up of over a dozen ‘story beats’ that propelled it forward through a protagonist/hero’s challenges and triumphs toward a conclusion.

³ From Book XI of *Metamorphosis*, by Ovid. (version: tr. Anthony S. Kline, 1999, extract used under fair usage copyright provisions, for the purposes of literary analysis/critique).

occasionally do a full ‘roll-call’ of all 49 of the available and pro produce songs (from all line-ups), and I still intend to professionally produce a couple more of the remaining song-fragments that feature lyrics by both myself and Liam (i.e. ‘Love and Drugs and Money’ and ‘Message Song’) in order to reach 50 songs and round out the oeuvre (at least from my angle, I believe Richie and Y.T. have copies of other songs containing Liam’s lyrics only (recorded between 1994 and 2010) that are not currently on public display.

He Sings as he Floats Downstream ... Despite the Severance

Due to the long-term psychological stresses of the ‘Severance Experience’ my music performer ‘self’ became traumatically frozen in time for around 16 years. I lost confidence in my singing and stopped performing music live in both amateur and professional settings. I also struggled to trust members of the music industry and looked elsewhere for creative camaraderie—and, luckily, found it. Despite this, I never stopped writing songs and the results became an important strand of a more expansive writing industry vocational identity that also involved, from the mid-1990s on, performance poetry, poetry writing for print publication, fiction writing, nonfiction writing, professional editing and teaching creative and professional writing to adults. From the late 1990s on I was, thankfully, able to make a living out of these varied ‘creative selves’.

Although the ‘Severance Experience’ is not the main subject of this article, I did need to overcome some of the special challenges thrown up in its aftermath in order to proceed properly with the large-scale song production goals I set myself in 2013, and finally completed in late 2022. After James’s, and then Liam’s passing, I also started to think about my own mortality and the legacy I might want to leave behind for my family, as well as fans and possible future fans of my music.

The Birth of *Interstitium*

From 1994 on, I started to accumulate a large number of songs that needed recording/producing and performing live. I needed, in short, or so I thought, a band. *Interstitium* was born in 2010 but didn’t really get off the ground until 2014. It began to mature in 2018 when I teamed up with Peter Gaines (in the UK) and Timmy de Armitt (in Nashville TN) and decided to professionally produce over 100 songs linked to both: a) my old band, *Goya’s Child (Original)* and b) my new project/band, i.e. *Interstitium*.



From late 2018 until early 2023 the task of completing (from the composing/musical and lyric writing perspectives), demoing (as pre-production guide recordings of vocals and instrumentation) and then working with Peter or Timmy, and their teams, to professionally produce these ‘100+ songs’ (representing about 9 studio albums) became my main creative task—and a huge, intricate, absorbing, challenging, expensive but, ultimately, fulfilling task and journey it proved to be.

All up I needed to complete 3 studio albums (or 31 songs) related to my contribution to *Goya’s Child (Original)* in the early 1990s, and around 6 studio albums (or 70 songs) linked to my new band/recording project, *Interstitium*. At time of writing, 95 songs have been completed/produced, with 5 more currently in production.

In the case of the professionally produced *Interstitium* songs, I sent out many, once completed, to dozens of Indie, underground, Alt. Rock, community, and in some cases, commercial radio stations all over the world (whether broadcasting conventionally, or, in

part, or entirely, over the WWW). The extensive radio play that had evaded—and still evades—the *Goya's Child (Original)* oeuvre, arrived instead for dozens of my *Interstitium* songs. There is some solace in these achievements, but I still feel thwarted and frustrated that my 30+ co-written *Goya's Child (Original)* songs cannot be sent out for radio play so easily, since many of those songs, in their now professionally produced form, would definitely find extensive play.

The radio plays of *Interstitium* songs started in mid-2020 and shows no signs of slowing down as 2023 gets under way. At time of writing there have been almost 7,500 confirmed radio plays (and no doubt thousands of others) across 47 songs. Also, for the first time ever, my songs have featured regularly in radio station and Indie music charts in a range of countries—totalling, at time of writing, 91 Chart Events.

Let's return, for a moment, to the middle of 2018. It marked a real low point for me, and I have no doubt the surviving members of my former band, since we had to deal with the death, due to a tragic biking accident, of former *Goya's Child (Original)* bassist, co-singer and co-songwriter, Liam Thorpe. This blow fell on the back of having lost our inspirational guitarist and co-songwriter, James Mannix, four years earlier. Since I had worked productively with Liam in 2010 to resolve a number (but not all) of the outstanding issues linked to my departure from *Goya's Child (Original)* in the mid-1990s, I took Liam's death particularly hard—he was way too young and left behind a grieving, loving family. He'd also contributed a great deal to the central Victorian music scene via other bands and music projects, so his passing was actually a loss to the entire local community.

From my perspective, also, we'd lost the voice of reason and negotiation, as well as one of the major creative talents of *Goya's Child*, and in the 6 months after his passing I was finally forced to accept that fact that a band of 3 (where once there had been 5) was no band at all, and never again would be, given the special talents and contributions made by the two deceased bandmates. It became increasingly obvious to me that either I had to give up entirely on professionally producing and performing my large back-log of songs, or I had to knuckle down to the probably onerous task of producing the songs either entirely on my own, or with a new band/recording band. It was a life or death moment for my musical self, since at that time—in my grief and frustration—I could see no easy way to the goal.

To move ahead with the project, then, I had to overcome not only the final elements of the psychological aftermath associated with the 'Severance Experience', but also several other major creative and personal hurdles. My father's health was failing around the time Liam passed away, and as the new project unfolded from late 2018 into 2019, Dad's health deteriorated further, until he passed away in the winter of 2019. Also in 2019, my partner, Sue, had to fight off a major health scare and my mother's routine hip operation turned into what initially fronted as a permanent disability, after the surgeon accidentally severed a key nerve during the operation. It was 'all happening', as they say! To make matters worse, in March 2020, the pandemic hit and for two years our Australian state (i.e. Victoria) had to endure a sequence of severe lockdowns in order to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. On top of all of this, various self-doubts—perhaps common to people writing songs for certain popular music genres after their mid-30s—assailed me constantly, serving to undermine my resolve and motivation at critical stages of the journey.

Four things kept me going during those difficult, at times grim, months and years (mid-2018 to early 2022) of family sickness and pandemic lockdowns: 1) The amazing final production quality etc. of so many of the songs I was working to produce with Peter Gaines and his team; 2) Getting to know an amazing bunch of supportive and talented Indie musicians, promoters and enthusiasts from all over the world; 3) (after June 2020) success with gaining fairly extensive radio play, as well as some chart success, at many stations

where *Interstitium* songs featured; 4) the supportive comments and enthusiasm for our songs posted over social media, on Music Show chat sessions, through interviews, or by radio announcers, etc. once the songs started to get play; and 5) my own determination to honour the promise I made to myself, in late 2018, that I would, metaphorically speaking, ‘leave it all out on the stage’ this time, by giving each song its best possible chance to find an audience.

The International Indie Music Community Sand-Blast a Major Creative Hurdle

Encountering the International Indie Music Scene/Community was a liberating experience for me during these years. Until that encounter I’d felt that the unwritten laws of my particular song-writing genre— i.e. Alternative Rock—were quite different to the unwritten laws of the other art domains I’d been working in. My flawed mind-set was—and I don’t know where this came from really, only that it was a major creative block for me—that unless one had attained *bona fide* ‘celebrity status’ in one’s youth there was no point writing and performing new music in certain popular genres beyond the age of about 35 i.e. that writing alt. rock songs, in my case, couldn’t be a serious life-long creative pursuit.

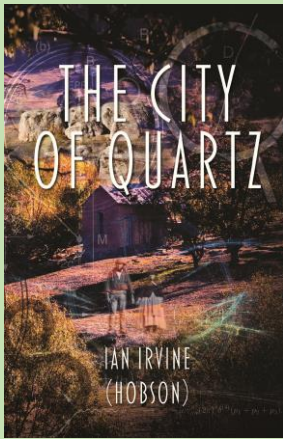
Joining the international Indie music community sand-blasted that self-imposed, to some extent, creative prison, replacing it with a new sense of creative freedom. It assisted me to side-step the traditional “achieving celebrity is the only goal!” pathway/endgame imposed upon so many by the corporate music scene, and replace it with a creative ethic of ‘just get on with it.’ That is: get on with writing and recording/producing your music, then perform it, but always set your own goals for what success looks like for you and your band.

Although there are, of course, many emerging and even established artists/bands in the Indie community with goals that resemble the goals of those seeking a traditional pathway to music industry success (and there is nothing wrong with that when it works to motivate an artist), there are also many in the Indie community setting their own unique goals and living their own version of music industry success. And everyone I’ve come to know is committed to putting out good music and living their lives as ‘life-long creatives’ committed to an arts discipline (i.e. music) that they love. That’s what I’ve really enjoyed about getting to know so many people in the international Indie community. I guess I’m talking about a reworked, i.e. for the 21st century, neo-punk ethic of ‘just do it!’

Media Revolutions Make Art Disciplines Take on New Forms for each New Era

There are dozens of platforms, both new media and traditional, (e.g. Indie music radio being one of the most important for me at present) currently nurturing a large international Indie music community. There are also tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of listeners following, primarily, Indie musicians (it’s just about all I listen to these days, I have to say!). I think that there is also a core authenticity to the Indie scene that is often absent in music put out by big name artists constrained by the demands of record company executives and PR departments. These days the world’s Indie artists, Indie-playing radio station owners, bloggers and ezine support sites, as well as the fans/readers/listeners, are all ‘connected’ 24/7 by the WWW and its plethora of social media platforms. It’s grown into a global community of artists and listeners that resembles more and more, arts milieus I’m familiar with in other arts genres (e.g. the writing community). To my mind, this is perfect ground, for inspirational outbursts of musical creativity.

Suffice to say, the international Indie music community helped put an end to several crippling creative blocks I was experiencing around creating new music, and I’m thus very grateful to all the bands/artists, listeners, Indie promoters and radio station people that I got to know after 2018.



An Indie and Transmedia Approach to Song-writing and Performing

When I started *Interstitium* I consciously wanted to work differently, as a songwriter musician, to how I'd worked with my first band. We'd had the classic alt rock experience of the 90s, but that didn't inspire me much as I approached mid-life. Also, the music world had undergone a revolution in the 20 years I'd been absent—both in terms of music styles and the impact of the digital revolution on so many aspects of the art discipline. I guess I wanted to bring more of my other 'creative selves', especially the fiction writer self, into my musical creations as the *Interstitium* project got under way. I also wanted to adopt a form of story-telling that takes advantage of the digital innovations of recent decades, i.e. Transmedia or Multiplatform story-telling. Unlike the big media corporations, I wanted to do Transmedia in an Indie 'community roots' setting ... I guess that's the uniqueness, really, of the *Interstitium* project. It's a long-running Transmedia Quantum Fiction story as well as a 'band'/'music recording project'.

Inspirations for the *Interstitium* Project?

I took some initial inspiration for the *Interstitium* project, from the way Alan Parsons had operated—and I guess I had narrative albums like those produced by Pink Floyd (e.g. *The Wall*), Pete Townsend (*Quadrophenia* & *Tommy*) etc. in mind. Properly ordered, the 70 songs, so far, of the *Interstitium* project contribute to one over-arching narrative—a Quantum Fiction narrative, to be sure, linked to 4 novels (but that's a whole other discussion, linked to Postmodern fiction and recent mutations to important Science Fiction tropes developed after the mid-20th century).

Novels and an Alt Rock Stage Show Dimension to the *Interstitium* Project

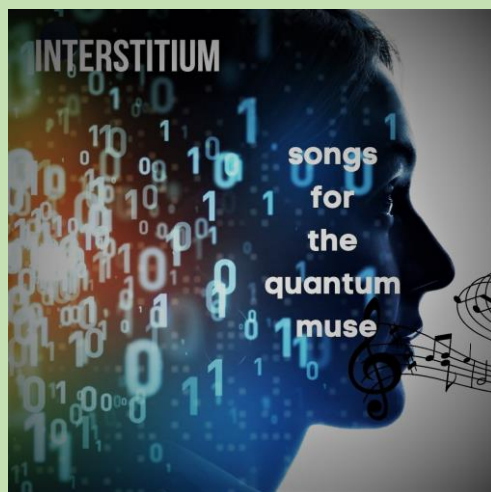
Though I loathe terms like 'rock opera' and 'rock musical', I guess we are attempting to link an alternative rock stage show, featuring music, and a discernible narrative with characters, to a large-scale song recording project (composed of 6 albums). Whatever the genre, however, a narrative approach to song-writing and performance is central and this approach fascinates and motivates me at this point in my life.

After the pandemic gradually ended, *Interstitium* could certainly have been conceptualised as primarily a gig/concert band (we had more than enough songs for that), but that path, on its own, bored me as I'd already acted out that dream in the 1990s. Instead, I wanted us to have an additional dimension, i.e. a narrative/alt rock stage show dimension. After I completed the novel 'The City of Quartz' in 2016—a novel featuring a band called *Interstitium* performing their songs to audiences in an alternative Australia—I realised I had enough songs for a fully-fledged alternative rock stage show based upon a compressed version of the main story lines of, not just that novel, but three other novels I've been working on. I was developing that narrative dimension to *Interstitium* whilst professionally producing the 70 or so songs. Here, however, is not the place to go into too much depth about the narrative and quantum fiction dimensions to the 'Songs of the Interstitium' project—I'll leave that task for a later chapter.

When will the Performance Side to *Interstitium* and 'Songs of the Interstitium' Begin?

The band I'm assembling for planned (i.e. from June 2023 onwards) performances in Australia, initially, is purpose selected. Like a troupe of actor/musos playing specific characters in a movie or a play, it needs to be multi-generational because there are 'characters' of different ages (indeed the same characters at different ages!) in the story. For example, the main character/singer, Rowan Sweeney, will appear as a young man, a 35 year-old and at mid-life as the story unfolds across 30 years, and in various parallel realities. Various versions of all the main character are central to the novels and therefore the music.

Consequently, this is not a normal band project—that would be too limiting—and I've had to put my own 'musical ego' (i.e. my mid-1990s 'alt rock self', if you like!) on the back-burner a fair bit to make the new project work. The musicians involved in the live/performance dimension to *Interstitium*, are being selected to tell a story—they have to be able to do a specific job for the story, they have to be actors as well as musicians, since Anika Miraj, Philip Godstar and Rowan Sweeney are all fictional musicians from alternative realities. We'll be bringing them to life in the live shows, which means the real (in our reality ☺) musicians of "*Interstitium*" have to step back a bit.



An International Team of Musicians and Producers and an Australian-based Song-writing and Performance Band

The aim of the 'pro production years', i.e. between 2019 and 2022, was to get good quality recordings of as many of the *Interstitium* project songs as possible finished and featuring on radio and elsewhere. This involved work with three teams of musicians and sound producers-engineers. The main team is in Australia (where I've worked with Evalyn Charalambous, Kara Indigo, and Australian poet Sue King-Smith, as well as several other co-writers/musos for specific songs i.e. Tim Jenkyns,

Rod Blackhirst and Sean Forbes). Mostly alone, sometimes with assistance, I worked to create full pre-production versions of 70 or so key *Interstitium* songs. The songs were then sent to our main creative collaborator (also my producer/mixer) Peter Gaines, and his team, operating out of studios in the UK but with connections to session musicians in the US and Europe. This fantastic team played a huge part in getting the songs to the levels they needed to be at for global distribution purposes.

To summarise, then: the production process involved an international collaboration (across three continents/four countries and dozens of artists). The live performance/stage show line up for *Interstitium* is planned to be very flexible for various reasons related to the narrative side of the project. I am surrounded by some great musicians here in central Victoria, so I'm sure some of them will feature in our line-up now and then. If we tour the northern hemisphere, we're also hopeful of featuring some of the musicians from Peter and Timmy's teams, given they know the songs so well.

Summary: Orpheus as a Phoenix Narrative

As 2023 beckons, the sense of disempowerment and incompleteness my songwriter/musician self once felt—i.e. the sixteen years between 1994 and 2010—has all but lifted. To return to

the metaphors of the final scenes of the Orpheus story (as told by Ovid and others), the severed limbs, etc. of Orpheus—after his encounter with the Maenads—have not been completely resurrected as per the bard’s original form. How could they be given my own new millennium creative interests, given, also, the way the music industry has changed since the 1990s, and, finally, given the tragic loss of two of the members of my original 90s band? However, the songs of that original band have managed to ‘play on’, though in limited ways, into the 3rd decade of a new century. However, if there is a ‘phoenix-like’ resurrection story at play here, it perhaps concerns the revival of my own musical self through the creative and professional challenges associated with professionally producing around 100 songs in just four years, and also in the way the 70+ new songs, for *Interstitium*, have become the musical foundations for ‘The Songs of the Interstitium’ transmedia story-telling project.