

Craney's Back

By Janet Preus

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There was a pretty good-sized group standing around in the control room at Aberdeen Recording Studios last week, watching Mark Craney lay down a drum track. Another take was required, and there was a brief discussion. "As long as the twelve of you agree," Craney quipped.

There weren't that many people in the room, and they were all good friends and admirers who'd come to reminisce and watch a real pro in action. Engineer Tim Andersen changed the mix in his monitor and Craney nailed it the next time around.

That Craney, a Sioux Falls native, is back in South Dakota at all is no small matter. Complications from diabetes pulled him off the road and ended a long and solid professional career gigging with top-level players. "In 1996, my kidneys gave out. I booked dialysis everywhere we went. That got a little scary," he said.

But dialysis keeps him going, while he continues his 8-year wait for another transplant—his second since health issues brought his career to a halt in 1997. That disease, his rare blood type, and his transplant history make him a difficult match for a donor.

But Craney lives with hope. "It's teaching me to be 'in the moment.' I choose to be happy," he said.

When Andersen, his former bandmate, called and asked him to record the first album at Aberdeen Recording Studios, it was the push Craney needed to lure him out of retirement.

"Tim's my old pal; I had to say yes," he said, "but it was pretty daunting." Craney and Andersen put a band together in the '70s and decided to go for the big time. "We all went to Nashville and starved there for awhile," Craney mused. It's the kind of quiet, dry humor that never quits with

him. Eventually, the band parted ways, but Craney and Andersen both landed in Los Angeles where Craney got his first big break.

"My first major gig was with Jean Luc Ponty. That was exciting—back in the fusion era. That was all I needed; we were playing in front of everybody," he said.

Andersen booked him for studio work, too, when he could get him. "Whenever anybody needed a drummer, I'd say, 'get Craney.'" Said Andersen.

Regular gigs with Jethro Tull, Gino Vannelli, Mark Almond, Tower of Power and others made for a nice career, doing what he loved "and getting paid well for it," Craney said. His last tour, with Eric Burdon, spanned three years and took him all over the world.

"Eric was wonderful. The music was simple, not so demanding, so I could do it," he said.

Until one night on Long Island, New York. "I drove 80 miles for dialysis, drove back, and walked on stage," he reflected. He knew he couldn't keep it up, no matter how much he wanted to play, so he headed back to Los Angeles where he and his dogs could visit his mother every day. He also teaches select drum students.

"I miss it. I miss all of it. I never got tired of it," he said. "Which is why [this recording session] last week was important, and not just another gig." Craney called it 'energizing.'

"I really didn't know what to expect," he said. "It just felt great to have a week bar hopping, recording, and everything else." But in three days, Craney had twelve songs in the can. "I can still keep time," he said. Andersen's assessment was more emphatic and belies Craney's almost fragile appearance. "He's rock solid," Andersen said. ♠