

Robert Berry

“Prime Cuts”

Magna Carta MA-1009



A Selection of Robert's Finest Work for Magna Carta
Featuring Performances by:

Stu Hamm, Steve Howe, Mike Mangini, Vinnie Moore, Simon Phillips, Jordan Rudess, Lief Sorbye, Mark Woods

CD is enhanced with bonus video “In The Studio With Robert Berry”.

In the Bay area, they know Robert Berry well. He has performed in venues ranging from the tiniest of clubs to the largest of stadiums. Fans have seen him in diverse circumstances, from Hush, a super group comprised of San Francisco area musicians, to his fronting role with “3”, alongside Keith Emerson and Carl Palmer. To put it mildly, Berry has kept busy composing, arranging, and performing with leading edge progressive music artists. An award winning producer and multi-instrumentalist, he displays an uncanny knack for keeping the melody prominent no matter how complex the musical structure upon which it rests.

Berry has played a large part, albeit sometimes behind the scenes, in Magna Carta Records, both as a performer and as a producer. A few tracks into *Robert Berry: Prime Cuts* and you will discover that he breathes the same air as the finest progressive artists of our time.

Robert Berry's *Prime Cuts* opens with a rousing version of “Roundabout” from *Tales From Yesterday*. Quite aside from the revamped opening and bridge, the attractive melody now sits well in a heavy half-time groove. At 5:18 the modulation is very much Yes, as is the *a cappella* vocal that follows. The alternate ending, acoustic guitar duet at 6:28, courtesy of no less than Steve Howe and Robert, takes us to the final chordal resolution. It's all signature Yes—and then some.

From *To Cry You a Song*, comes “Minstrel In The Gallery”, a stellar tribute to Ian Anderson and Jethro Tull. The medieval mandolin salutation yields quickly to a strolling vamp with requisite Martin Lancelot Barre-ish fuzz block-chording and Barriemore Barlow style floor tom riding—along with Lief Sorbye on bodhran, the indigenous frame drum. At 3:12 a quiet respite, very much in the Jethro Tull “vignette” tradition, sets up the chorus. Otherwise, a settled feeling prevails, almost as if Berry has appropriated Ian Anderson's love of ornamentation and made it a little more direct in impact. Ian Anderson's letter to Magna Carta shows his admiration for Robert's work on this tribute.

In “Brain Damage” (*The Moon Revisited*), Berry adjusts his vocal intonation ever-so-slightly to emulate wispy, Pink Floyd style vocals, and gives the drum track a little extra “swing factor” to match Mason's signature lilt. Meanwhile, the jangling guitars and seagull volume pedal work are Floyd-personified.

Next it's “Watcher of the Skies” updated Pro Tools mix from Robert Berry and Hush: *Supper's Ready*, a tribute to what many typify as Genesis' golden era. Instead of duplicating Phil Collins' unison (left hand/right hand) drum part, Berry transfers it over to acoustic guitar and establishes a more folkloric vibe, retaining the 6/4 time signature. When the drums do enter, they're pared down and blunt. Meanwhile in chorus and bridge, the punch is every bit as obvious as in the thirty-year old vinyl classic. Trivia Time: At around the 4:08 mark, Berry teases by injecting the theme from “Dance on a Volcano”/“Los Endos”, lifted from *Trick of the Tail* Genesis. It's an uplifting hook that transports us to the majestic ending.

From *Subdivisions*, a tribute to Rush, springs “Different Strings”. Interesting how Berry's tenor vocal, although contrasting with Geddy's upper octave shrill delivery, delivers the message so palatably! Guest drummer Mike Mangini excels in this percussive territory.

Another classic gets Berry's even-handed treatment, this time from ELP. In “Karn Evil 9 1st Impressions”, from *Encores, Legends & Paradox*, Berry gains the expert assistance of Jordan Rudess, who clearly has a field day, Mark Wood, who contributes exciting violin, and Simon Phillips, who anchors it all with a drum part that displays a welcome looseness. Berry is obviously in his element on guitar, soaring to seagull heights around 6:40.

“A Theme For The Wheel Of Time” and “Winespring Reel” are both culled from Berry's album, *Soundtrack For The Wheel Of Time*, referring to the famous Robert Jordan fantasy novels. Both tunes obtain a Celtic edge, half Strawbs and half Fairport Convention. Michael Mullen contributes stinging violin parts reminiscent of Dave Swarbrick at his pinnacle, particularly in “Wheel”. In the rock reel “Winespring” things dance sprightly until a hush falls at 2:30, followed by a joyous return to the theme.

For a cynical commentary on life in The Valley, turn to “Life Beyond L.A.”. It's an effective exploration of the Los Angeles ethic of hopefulness-meets-gloom, with Berry turning in the correct hyped up guitar break shortly after the three-minute mark. Of course, in LA fashion, the track is built around a chorus hook that'll keep you humming! Berry handles all chores admirably here; he's producer, singer, and he plays all instruments. This newly recorded and never-before-released track was included as homage to Berry's recent spot as lead vocalist and guitar player in Ambrosia

The inclusion of this Yes-inspired track, “Carol of the Bells”, off The December People's *Sounds Like Christmas*, demonstrates the breadth of Robert Berry's vision as a producer. As with other songs on this Magna Carta compendium, he is clearly in the business of adding value, not producing curiosities. And wait—is that the opening guitar chord to “Roundabout” that closes off the “Carol”?

If you are not familiar with Robert Berry, you will delight in this Magna Carta Records collection assembled by label founder Peter Morticelli. You will see immediately why Berry rates a Prime Cuts album alongside legendary label mates.