

NICK BINKLEY

Biography by Jonathan Widran

A fascinating recent Op-Ed in the New York Times posed the question “Is Music The Key To Success?”, and then asked prominent high achievers in other fields, such as (Alan Greenspan, Paul Allen and former World Bank President James D. Wolfenson -- all who happen to be musicians -- to explain how serious musical training correlates with success. Many agreed that music opened up the pathways to creative thinking; sharpened their ability to collaborate and listen; fostered the ability to weave disparate ideas together; and gave them the power to focus on the present and future simultaneously. Former Bank of America Corp vice chairman and bank board director Nick Binkley is arguably another example of how music and business can not only coexist, but even harmonize and complement each other.

Over the past 40 years, Binkley has fully embodied these dynamic qualities in his own fascinating parallel careers as a banker/venture capitalist/international relations wonk...and as a musician and recording artist. Nearly two decades after releasing *Pin Stripe Brain*, his critically acclaimed 1996 debut as a singer/songwriter, Binkley—while still a partner in Forrest, Binkley & Brown, the Newport Beach, California based venture capital company-- is now winding down the financial business side of his life to focus fully on his creative endeavors.

These include conceiving and co-producing “Free 2 Rock,” a powerful 90 minute, star studded documentary film, directed by four time Emmy winning filmmaker Jim Brown, which explores the previously untold story of how rock and roll contributed to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of Soviet Communism; in addition to his founding and heading the Diana Padelford Binkley Foundation (“The Diana Foundation”), established in 2004 as a charitable institution focusing on women’s health issues, in the wake of the death of its namesake, Nick’s late wife; and most recently, with the release of *100 Parts of Heart*, Binkley’s first album since *Let The Boy Jam* in 1999, which features songs he penned in the wake of 9/11 and after experiencing Diana’s sudden passing in 2003.

Tapping into deep and daring, painful yet hopeful emotional places in his musical soul, the singer/songwriter creates a powerful testament to an extraordinary woman in these songs, the unexpected beauty that emerges through the grief process and the distinctly human ability to process loss and move on without losing hope. The album marks the latest release from PSB Records, a San Diego based label active in the local community promoting and distributing recordings for San Diego area artists for two decades. All proceeds from the sale of *100 Parts of Heart* and licensing of its songs will go to The Diana Foundation. In addition, all profits of PSB Records go to the Foundation.

Diana’s passing in 2003 prompted many powerful changes in Binkley’s life. He disbanded his Street Dogs band; made the decision to wind down his hands-on involvement in Forrest Binkley & Brown, which he had co-founded in 1993; and began to spend more time in Orcas Island in Washington’s peaceful and picturesque San Juan Islands, where he built a second home. The island has been a retreat for Binkley for almost 40 years. Over the last decade, he has spent a great deal of time there reflecting and writing songs (including many of the haunting, compelling pieces that would ultimately appear on *100 Parts of Heart*), sometimes by himself, sometimes

with the company of his lab mix “Yeager.” He also spent time there with his longtime musical collaborator and onetime band mate Mark Hart, well known for his many years with Crowded House and Supertramp.

He began traveling to China and Tibet frequently to learn more about their homeopathic medicines and in an effort to cope with intense migraine headaches following his wife’s death. During one of his visits with his Tibetan lama (“teacher”), he learned about prayer wheels, which are turned clockwise in an effort to send prayers into the wind and bring souls back to the place they began. One time, the lama and 125 monks performed a sacred ceremony for an entire day in an effort to “bring Diana’s soul back to the place it began.” This was part of the powerful personal journey Binkley took in the wake of her death – and at one point, the lama asked if he would consider moving to Tibet for an extended period. Binkley references this experience in a line in the song “Love You Forever,” where he sings: “I pray Dan Ba Lama brings your soul home to me when he’s through.” (Read the inspirations for and the storylines of the remaining songs on the attached CD description of *100 Parts of Heart*)

Binkley’s hands on involvement in the creation of “Free 2 Rock,” an eight year-in-the-making project produced in collaboration with the Grammy Museum, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Stas Namin Center of Moscow, stems from his decades long involvement with Russian rock musicians, along with his involvement in international relations. A meeting in 1977 with Russian singer Valery Saifudinov, who had founded the first rock and roll band in the former Soviet Union, led Binkley to help set up rehearsal and recording operations in a San Francisco loft with rock and roll émigrés from the U.S.S.R. During that period, he befriended and supported the first wave of Soviet rockers allowed to immigrate to America in the mid-70s. These musicians—including Saifudinov, Grisha Dimant, Serge Diujikov and Yuri Valov, who would later become Binkley’s band (Nick Binkley & The Street Dogs), recorded and toured with him in Russia and appeared with him on Russian national television and radio. That band also provided the musical foundation for the recording and live performances of *Pin Stripe Brain* and *Let The Boy Jam*. Saifudinov is also one of the engineers and producers on *100 Parts of Heart*.

Binkley, who conceived “Free 2 Rock” with Saifudinov, and wrote the story with Saifudinov and long-time international entertainment executive, producer and artist manager Doug Yeager, has also had the unique privilege of collaborating with Vyacheslav Malezhik, one of Russia’s top pop stars for more than four decades. In 1996, the two co-wrote the powerful post Cold War anthem, with librettos in Russian and English, “Novi Mir” (which roughly translates to “New Peace” or “New World”) to celebrate the promising new era in Russian and American relations. The song appears on Binkley’s album *Let The Boy Jam* and also on one of Malezhik’s subsequent album in Russia, where it received extensive airplay and on his PSB Records release titled *Novi Mir/New World*.

“This was a time when Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin drank vodka together in the Kremlin,” says Binkley, who for many years has been a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and formerly served on the Advisory Council of Johns Hopkins’ Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in Washington, D.C.; and on the International Advisory Board (“IAB”) of the University of California San Diego’s Graduate School for International Relations and Pacific Studies, where he served as its first Chairman.

“After making music with Russian musicians for years,” he continues, “it was a major breakthrough to get together with a huge pop star and record and perform after the collapse of

the Berlin Wall.” Binkley and Malezhik appeared together on radio and television, while also performing in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the late 90s. They later reunited for a concert at the Kremlin Palace Concert Hall in 2007, which was televised nationally. Binkley attributes his original idea for “Free 2 Rock” to the electric feeling of working with Malezhik during that exciting and hopeful post-Soviet era.

“Free 2 Rock” tells the revolutionary story of how during the Cold War, the U.S. Government employed the soft power of Rock and Roll as a tool to reach the hearts and minds of youth behind the Iron Curtain. Over the last half of the 20th Century, rock and roll spread like wildfire across the Soviet Empire. The Kremlin, KGB and its security satellites throughout Eastern Europe felt threatened by this foreign “virus.” They over-reacted and cracked down harshly on rock and roll and the youth who embraced it, resulting in it becoming the forbidden fruit desired by millions of oppressed and rebellious teenagers. Their enthusiasm for the music not only inspired a youth rebellion that openly defied the Communist system, it also fueled many of the liberation movements in the occupied territories of Eastern Europe and the Baltic States.

Filmed in hi-def with the highest quality production standards, the story covers the 36 year period between 1955 to 1991 and includes interviews and/or performances by many notables from the worlds of politics, including Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev, President Jimmy Carter and Vike-Freiberga of Latvia, to rock and roll royalty - Elvis Presley, Beach Boys, The Beatles, Rolling Stones, Billy Joel, Bruce Springsteen, Elton John, Scorpions and Michael Jackson. Another key contributor to the documentary is co-producer Stas Namin, Russia’s preeminent impresario, entertainment producer and cultural interlocutor, who provided insightful interviews and rare, historic footage for the film. The first successful Soviet producer of rock festivals, Namin, the grandson of Anastas Mikoyan, Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union during the Cuban Missile Crisis with the U.S., is the owner of concert and theater facilities, a recording studio, art galleries and the Moscow Symphony Orchestra.

During the last ten challenging years following Diana’s passing, Binkley invested a lot of heart, time and energy in creating The Diana Padelford Binkley Foundation (“The Diana Foundation”) as a charitable institution in her memory. Diana’s death in August 2003 followed adverse side effects of treatments of high dose steroids which had been prescribed for chronic back pain caused by a herniated disc. Binkley and the foundation’s team of research doctors soon learned that high dose steroid treatments can induce neuropsychiatric impairments (steroid psychosis) in one out of five patients. In 3% of the affected cases, patients with no prior history of suicidal behavior or acute depression take their lives.

The Foundation’s chief objective is to educate the public about the potential dangerous side effects of steroid therapies. In addition, the Foundation assist clinicians in communicating with and coordinating better pain medication, treatment, and services for women who rely primarily on homeopathic remedies for the treatment of common illness and pain. It was established to provide information and facilitate dialogue between western physicians, alternative medicine practitioners and patients and family members regarding the diagnosis, treatment and management of pain in women. The Foundation also co-sponsors colloquia around the latest research into the adverse side effects of steroid therapies.

The Diana Foundation has co-sponsored two conferences on “*Pain Management in Women Over The Life Cycle*,” in 2006 and 2007, with the University of California, San Diego Medical

School/Department of Psychiatry. It has also underwritten two colloquia: Glucocorticoids and Mood: Clinical Manifestations, Risk Factors and Molecular Mechanisms (June, 2008) and an international consensus workgroup on Neuropsychiatric Sequelae of Glucocorticoid Treatment (April, 2012), both co-sponsored by UCSD's Medical School/Department of Psychiatry.

One of the key experiences that led Binkley to successful parallel careers in global banking and rock and roll came in 1975. He left his “day job” as Assistant Treasurer in Chase Manhattan Bank’s Middle Eastern Petroleum Group in Beirut to study at the Songwriting Workshop at the Guitar Study Center in New York City with Paul Simon’s brother Eddie and music industry veteran Barry Kornfeld, who became Binkley’s mentor. Prior to that, the Pasadena, California born Binkley—a graduate of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies—had worked for Chase Manhattan Bank in London as a Senior Credit Analyst for Europe. It was Kornfeld’s suggestion that Binkley—clearly driven by both his passions—do both at the same time.

Binkley’s decision to make a living through banking while drawing on that work experience and recycling his corporate life for song ideas led to the fascinating duality he ultimately chronicled on *Pin Stripe Brain*. The concept of that album was about the singer’s observations of the workplace mentality of white collar “suits,” whether they were bankers, lawyers, accountants or businessmen. The collection gave him the opportunity to reflect, in song, upon the numbing treadmill of corporate America and its tendency to stifle employee individuality—allowing the slow wasting away of youthful curiosity and creativity.

Binkley joined Security Pacific Bank in 1977 as assistant VP in the corporate banking group and was promoted the next year to VP. At the same time, he formed a band which included Mark Hart, produced two demos and played The Palomino Club in Los Angeles. From 1983 to 1993, Binkley served as a member of the investment committee of Security Pacific Corporation’s Venture Capital Group, which led him to form his own venture capital company, Forrest Binkley & Brown. Prior to leaving Security Pacific, he rose to Vice Chairman and member of the Board of Directors. With the merger in 1992 of Security Pacific Bank and Bank of America, he became Vice Chairman of B of A, and served on the bank’s Board of Directors until he left in 1993.

“The reason I began writing songs and making music in the first place still holds true today,” says Binkley. “It’s about connecting on a personal level with your deepest feelings. In the beginning, I would shake off the corporate dust to stop, look and listen to what life is really all about. For many years, my musical life was about shattering the image of all ‘Pinstripe Brains’ as one dimensional automatons. But since 2003, writing songs has been more like a salve, a kind of self medication. I like to think it has a redemptive quality to it, as though to say ‘I’m still struggling, but I am going to make it.’ I think my earlier songs were more about trying to communicate what I learned from straddling two distinct and polar opposite worlds at the same time. Now it’s about taking these private thoughts I’ve had in the wake of a personal tragedy and allowing others to experience that journey with me, in the hopes that it will resonate and echo something.”

100 PARTS OF HEART

Invoking a reference to Ben Weatherstaff, the kindly old gardener who tended “The Secret Garden” in Francis Hodgson Burnett’s classic novel once a year for ten years, Nick Binkley has chosen to release his new album *100 Parts of Heart* a decade after the sudden passing of his wife Diana in part because “there is something about ten years being a period of time which allows a grieving person to pick up the pieces and to get one’s life back together.” He had already written two of the album’s songs, the 9/11 inspired “Angels of September” and “My Mind’s Eye.” He chose to save those pieces and include them on this 14 track collection because they perfectly connected with the multi-faceted thematic landscape.

The daring and raw, no holds barred, melodically and harmonically rich and lyrically poetic journey of *100 Parts of Heart* mourns a death, celebrates a life and shows the shadowy movement from darkness and despair to glimpses of light. Though he originally wrote these songs without any specific goal regarding the release of a commercial recording, he has, by digging into the kind of creativity that only comes from emerging from the proverbial “dark night of the soul,” created a work that, while highly personal, is also universal. It is about every step of the journey: remembering the magic; processing the loss; celebrating the memories that remain and getting through what you’re going through with dignity, resolve and, above all else, hope. It is a once in a lifetime emotional musical experience.

“Music has always been my refuge,” says Binkley. “My father died when I was 14, and I took refuge in my guitar. I had written the 9/11 songs and had finally begun to process and move beyond the shock of that terrible day. The son of one of our close friends was in the plane that went into the Pentagon. It hit us like a bomb and then – Diana. Grief dims the soul; my days turned to night. Music came to me over the years like a salve, a balm for the soul. I was writing from a deeper place, allowing myself to discover an inner resilience via something like a hidden language. Through music, I was able to synthesize what seemed to be irreconcilable and chaotic information and start to make sense where there seemed none.

Speaking about the title of the album *100 Parts of Heart* (also a song on the collection), Binkley adds, “When Diana was going through a period of disassociation (neuropsychiatric impairment) caused by the taking of high dose steroids, I didn’t know what was going on with her. She said she felt like Humpty Dumpty, ‘scattered all over the floor and trying to get herself back together again.’ I wrote ‘100 Parts of Heart’ in reference to that but also because my heart didn’t break in two but into a hundred parts – and I, in turn felt like Humpty Dumpty trying to put the pieces of my life, and our dreams, back together again. The number is a metaphor for all of the faces of the prisms of the heart, and the heartbreak that comes to all these different faces in the wake of a sudden tragic loss. The title actually comes from a dream I had. I once heard that when your heart is broken, the only way to get it whole again is for the person who broke it to hand it back to you. So in this dream, my heart is broken and scattered about the floor, when Diana appears and hands an intact heart to me. And that has allowed me over time to move on and learn to let go and love again.”

100 Parts of Heart was produced by Mark Hart (Crowded House, Supertramp) and Steve Dudas (Quincy Jones, Ringo Starr, Ozzy Osbourne) with Nick Binkley & Valery Saifudinov; “Love You Forever” was produced by Marc Intravaia. Engineers include Dudas, Saifudinov and

Richard Barron. The main band includes Binkley on lead vocals, acoustic and classical guitar, and electric guitar; Dudas on lead electric and acoustic guitar, dobro and bali and baritone guitar; Hart on keyboards, Wurlitzer, B3 Hammond Organ, lap steel guitar, slide guitar and pedal steel; Sinclair Lott on drums; and Cliff Hugo on bass. Guests include Radoslav Lorkovic on accordion and piano, Christina Vierra, who provides co-lead vocals with Binkley on the gospel-flavored “River Wide”; and Doug Lunn on bass in “Rosalee.”

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Binkley included brief liner notes on each track of *100 Parts of Heart* in the CD Booklet. The following are further commentaries on each track in his words:

“The Mind’s Eye” (Bishop School Chapel): “That brief intro to the album was from a live video recording from the final memorial service to Diana that took place at the Bishop’s School Chapel in La Jolla, California in September 2003. It is an opportunity to take the listener into that sacred moment.”

“The Visiting”: “I am referring to a visiting from the other side. I have had a lot of dreams about Diana over the years, and they felt like visitations from her. The lyrics are a poem by Franz Wright. One day I came across the poem in *The New Yorker* and it blew me away because it’s a poem about both waking and sleeping and death and dying – and I was suffering from insomnia. It’s about that interim moment between waking and sleeping that is completely opaque to us. The challenge was to track Mr. Wright down and get his permission to write music to the poem and record it, and I was blessed to have received that. It’s a very powerful reflection.”

“Hundred Parts of Heart”: “The heart doesn’t just break in two, but is scattered all over the floor. It’s the idea of getting your heart given back to you, which I experienced very profoundly in a dream about Diana.”

“Too Many Memories”: “This is a wonderful tune by the late Stephen Bruton, who was a friend of ours, a well known Austin musician (born and raised in Ft. Worth). His credits included co-writing and co-producing with T-Bone Burnett the music for the film “Crazy Heart.” He wrote the song in 4/4 time and I rearranged it to 6/8, not a dirge but it has a bit of that feeling. They played this song at his funeral in 2009. The most meaningful line to me is, ‘Life plays its tricks – some cruel and unfair/not even a fool can pretend they don’t care/and the lesson you learn and you don’t dare forget what makes you grow old is replacing hope with regret.’ It’s a song about hope, staying alive.”

“Rosalee”: “This one was improvised at Flight 19 Recording Studios in San Diego. I borrowed a few lines from a 16th Century poet named Monzaemon Chikamatsu, well known for his poems on ‘love suicides.’ It’s a song of redemption and has a Celtic feel to it, a reflection of my Irish and Scottish heritage. My grandmother’s name was Rose, but I am referring to Diana in the song. I played my classical guitar on this track.”

“Learning To Live”: “It’s one of the covers on the album that I found relevant to the theme. Lucinda Williams, who included it on her 2007 album *West*, wrote it after the death of a close

family member and a hard break up. My favorite line is ‘I’ll take the best of what you had to give/I’ll make the most of what you left me with.’”

“Love You Forever”: “This is a way for me to declare that love isn’t “just until death do us part,” like they say in the wedding ceremonies. But it doesn’t originate with me. I went to the wedding of one of my daughter Pepper’s friends in 2005. When the vows were being exchanged, the minister used the conventional line and the groom interrupted and said to his bride, ‘No, I will love you forever.’” And then he added, ‘Forever means through everything’.”

“Loved You So Easily (Baby Blue)”: “This one came out of nowhere and it’s about daring to love someone the way that person loves you.” It’s really about Orcas Island, where Diana’s family had a home and where I built one after she passed away. The sea up there is 48 degrees but she would be out in the water swimming with the seals. That’s a cold, cold sea. The idea is that we were going to spend the rest of our lives together, but ‘how can you not honor a given fate?’ I didn’t have to try very hard to love her. The night she died, I actually heard her in a deep dream calling my name. I woke with a shot and found her lifeless.”

“Angels in September”: “As I wrote in the album notes, 9/11 will be in our memories as vividly as the 4th of July, as we remember and revere the angels of September and the mourning we experienced in America.”

“River Wide”: “It’s a gospel flavored tune; one of my all-time favorites. When you’re going through this kind of tragedy, you fall back on comforting things, and one of those is religion. The chorus is about crossing the river wide to a beacon of hope that’s on the other side. The light has always been there, you just have to open your eyes. It’s my way of beginning to see my way out of the pain. Christine Vierra who sang it with me is a well known and regarded singer-songwriter in the Boston area.”

“I Will Follow You”: “It has to do with my time together with Diana in more idyllic circumstances, when we first met in Colorado in the 1960s. That’s where the imagery of green fields, mountain meadows and streams comes from. She is calling to me, and I will follow her beyond this earth at some point. But more importantly for now, I will follow the dreams we created together. They will never die.”

“Just In Time”: “I wrote this tune before she died, and it is somewhat prophetic so I chose to include it. It’s a story song about not just Diana, but some of my women friends trying to find their way. She’s a hitchhiker on the side of life’s road, gets into a car with a stranger, but then in the end heads back home where she started. “Home” used here record is more a reference to the other side, our heavenly home.”

“Love You Just The Same” – “It starts with a choral chant, intoning the Lord in Latin, “forgive me.” When there’s a suicide, there is always guilt in the survivors who ask themselves what more could have been done? The chorus gives way to a poetic and romantic love song and then, “I’ll still love you just the same” on the other side of daylight.”

“My Minds Eye II” – “It’s the bookend to the opening piece on the album, produced and improvised live at Sonora Studios in Los Angeles. One night following 9/11, as I was playing the tune in my home studio, Diana came by and said, ‘That’s the most beautiful song you’ve ever written for me.’ She was referencing the line ‘I can feel your arms reach out for me when I turn out the light; I can feel your arms reach out for me from across the other side.’ I often traveled for business and we were apart. She assumed it was about ‘reaching out to her while gone from home.’ Actually, the song was written to evoke the pain of loss the survivors of 9/11 felt for their loved ones. Mark Hart knew Diana’s affection for the song and suggested I play it at Diana’s memorial service at the Bishop’s School Chapel in La Jolla. I played it on my electric Fender 12-string and it became the theme that connects in my heart the tragedies of 9/11 and Diana.”