

**This interview with
BRUCE BOTNICK,
co-producer of “Forever Changes” by Love,
was conducted by the Library of Congress
on August 10, 2016.**



Bruce Botnick

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS: Legend has it that there was a lot of in-fighting among the members of Love at the start of this album’s recording. Is that true? Did you know that going in? And how did you mitigate that?

BRUCE BOTNICK: I tried not to get too involved in the drama. The reason we brought in the Wrecking Crew [a group of talented studio musicians working in LA at the time] was that the band really was just not together; they didn’t have a common purpose. Arthur [Lee] was actually starting to look to replacing parts of the band but never verbally said it out loud, but the band could feel it.

So, in this instance, when we brought in the Wrecking Crew, it rattled the band’s cage a bit, causing them to come to the front and then they played really well. They didn’t want to end up not being part of the album.

LOC: You have worked with both the Doors and Love. Can you compare your studio experiences with both groups?

BB: With the Doors you had four individuals who were one. With Love, you had one individual—Arthur Lee. Arthur wrote most of the music and the lyrics. The record was all Arthur’s, except for the two songs Bryan MacLean wrote, “Alone Again Or.” and the beautiful and haunting “Old Man.”

But Arthur was it. It was Arthur’s vision from the beginning.

LOC: Who made the decision to bring in some members of the Wrecking Crew to record two of the songs?

BB: I’m guilty here. The band was really listless and uninspired. I sat down with Arthur and said we weren’t going to get anything—get a record—if we didn’t do something to shake things up.

I had been working a great deal with the Wrecking Crew, so I said, "Let's go into the studio with them and see what we get." We did one three-hour session-and recorded two songs: "Andmoreagain" and "The Daily Planet." Both Arthur and Johnny Echols played on the session.

LOC: Was Arthur Lee onboard with the idea of bringing in these other musicians?

BB: Oh, yes, if Arthur hadn't had been, it wouldn't have happened. I couldn't have done it without his participation.

LOC: What do you think sets the string and horn arrangements on "Forever Changes" apart from others of the period?

BB: It was what Arthur heard in his head, he sang his melodies and counter melodies to David Angel, the arranger, and they became the templates for the arrangements. This wasn't a matter of hiring an arranger to come up with arrangements without the artist's involvement. Before bringing David Angel into the fold, I had approached Jack Nitzsche, who had created the arrangements for Phil Spector. Jack liked the music but was busy on another project that he was producing.

At that time, The Tijuana Brass were very popular all over the radio and TV, and it was common to have a "tip of the hat" to another artist in their style on your album. Beyond bringing David Angel into the mix, that was my contribution to the taste and feel of the arrangements.

LOC: What was Arthur Lee like? How did he compare to some of the other artists you have worked with throughout your career?

BB: Well, Arthur was, first and foremost, a terrific poet. I mean he was just brilliant. The only person I know of that I could compare him to was Jim Morrison.

As a lyricist, he could really take you on a trip. He never sat in a room and made believe that he was a 13-year-old girl. Arthur had a broad imagination and a great sense of humor; which stands out mightily in his lyrics.

"The snot has caked against my pants, it has turned to crystal, There's a bluebird sitting on a branch, I think I'll get my pistol...."

He was also always open to new approaches and interpretations with his songs. I'd say to him, "Did you mean this in this lyric" and he'd be like, "Yeah, I guess I did, I hadn't given much thought about it," he was totally collaborative and open.

But he was a benevolent dictator with his band.

LOC: Is "Forever Changes" a "political" record?

BB: Oh, some of it, yes. There's a running commentary on the state of society throughout the album. I think that's one of the reasons that the music has proven to have legs. It's the depths of the words. You hear it and you immediately relate to it, it doesn't matter about the age group or ethnicity.

You know, we were all in our low 20s when we recorded "Forever Changes." Later, when I taught at USC, I'd play it for 18 year-olds and they immediately locked into it.

That's what you get with people like Arthur, Jim Morrison and Bob Dylan. You have creative people who have something to say and a truly unique way of saying it.

LOC: Did you worry about how “commercial” the album was going to be or not be while you were making it?

BB: It never crossed my mind. It never does. If I go into the studio thinking I want to do something “commercial,” then I'm dead meat. It stands in the way of what is in the artist's head to begin with, lyrically and melodically.

LOC: Johnny Echols has said that “You Set the Scene” was assembled from three unfinished songs by Arthur Lee. Do you recall of how that song was developed?

BB: Johnny is correct. There was probably nobody closer to Arthur and who shared, day in and day out, what vicissitudes came Arthur's way and what he was thinking.

LOC: Why do you think this particular album has endured?

BB: It's the words plus the music and the performance. There's hasn't been anything like it since; nobody has even gotten close. It's the uniqueness of Arthur's wit and Bryan's sensitivity. Arthur was a cornucopia; he kept on giving.

LOC: Can you pick out a favorite cut on the album?

BB: I can't do that. I like the whole record. That's the weird thing. I'll go years without listening to it and then I'll listen to it again and it's like I'm hearing it for the first time.

You know, it only took four to five days to make the album, but that was not unusual at the time. I remember recording the Ventures around that time too, and we recorded two sessions with them in one day: 10am to 1pm and then 2pm to 5pm.

From ten until one, we'd record side one of the album; from two to five, we'd do side two. The next day we'd cut the lacquer masters and then the albums would be in stores the day after that. Of course, that's when artists did two or three albums a year.

LOC: Did you remain in contact with Arthur later in life?

BB: Unfortunately, no. I've since gotten to spend some time with his wife. She's a lovely lady and she's trying to keep his music and legacy alive....

You know there's one story about the recording that I'm not sure I've ever told....

We were recording the basic tracks at Western Recorders Studio One. It was Bill Putnam's studio, a large room where Sinatra and Barbra Streisand recorded.

We took a break between songs, and I believe it was Bryan, he was wandering in the hall and ran into Benny Goodman who was recording in Studio Two.

Brian invited him in. Benny sat in the control room. The guys played and Arthur was singing live. And then Benny said, “They swing!” A wonderful testament to the music that Arthur grew up listening to.

Arthur was really a jazz and blues musician at heart and was influenced by Miles Davis and other great jazz musicians of the time. When you listen to the album, you can really hear the jazz in Arthur.

A lot of the West Coast jazz musicians had started following Love from the first album, they really connected with it. At the time, they were looking to move jazz into the lexicon of the modern listener. Later, while I was recording a Jazz album with Bud Shank and a who's who of the West Coast Jazz scene, the musicians were asking all sorts of questions about Arthur and Love. It was interesting the influence Arthur had on the guys that influenced him.

