

The Grouse House Gazette

Thoughts and Observations on [Music](#), Nature, and Politics from the Catskill Mountains

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PAUL SIMON'S CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT / "STRANGER TO STRANGER"

This past week Paul Simon stated in an interview that he [would be retiring soon](#) and transitioning into a more peaceful life... as I think we all aspire to do. He is after all... 74.

I personally would like to thank and congratulate him for the wonderfully evolving, enlightening, and sometimes challenging music that he has created (which became the soundtrack to much of my life for the past half century).

But his recording career went back even further to 1957... When he and Garfunkel recorded as [Tom & Jerry](#)... and had a #40 minor hit... Driven to that position thanks to [Alan Freed](#) and the payola of the day... But it did sell 100,000 copies... and made the pair of 16 year olds \$4,000 a piece.

I have been meaning to write something about Simon's new (and now possibly *final*) album... for weeks now.

But with the absolute insanity of the current election I haven't been able to break away from writing about Trump!

But... I've been listening to *nothing* but "Stranger to Stranger" since it came out on June 3rd... and I haven't been this obsessed with a new album in at least ten years.

It is absolutely wonderful!

And also *my* vote for the best album of his career.

Yes... I include "[Graceland](#)"... "Rhymin Simon" and "Still Crazy" in that list. The new album is simply *that* good.

I remember when "Graceland" first came out in 1986...

I had just moved to New York... was in Boston... and somehow got an early copy on cassette from a music retailer (back then I was working as a "suit" in the music business).

I was driving away from the [record store](#) and put "[Graceland](#)" into the rental car [cassette deck](#).

(Links provided for those that don't know what these are...)

And after Simon's first line about... "the bomb in the baby carriage was wired to the radio"... I ejected the cassette and told myself that I *really* needed to listen to this somewhere that I could totally concentrate... as this was *very* different from the Paul Simon that I thought I knew.

As wonderful and as natural as the "Graceland" album may sound to everyone today... it was extremely revolutionary at the time... and although the South African musicians

connected into Simon's world seamlessly... it was a bit jarring at first. As it is with the new "Stranger to Stranger".

The new album ignites that same "Graceland-like" hybrid of musical experiences... as Simon combines his earlier collaborations of South African, South American, and New Orleans rhythms... with African guitars... and Brian Eno's techno-chops from the "[Surprise](#)" album (Keeping in mind that Simon essentially invented looping on "Cecilia" in 1970).

But then... Simon *layers* on top of this culturally mixed and techno-looped percussive wizardry... his current obsession with the music of composer [Harry Partch](#).

Partch believed that the standard 12 tones in an octave of music wasn't enough... so he invented his own form of music that expanded it out over 43 tones... AND THEN Partch *invented* his own instruments to play his music!

Partch's instruments are preserved today by Montclair State University in New Jersey... with whom Simon worked to record the strange unearthly instrument sounds that are sometimes disturbing and beautiful at the same time. I fell in love with the "[World of Harry Partch](#)" album in the mid 70s while working in a "record store" while still in college.

At the age of 72... Simon has once again pushed his musical envelope out even further... and he's brought along 50 years of songwriting and collaborative experiences.

And on top of all of this sonic wonderment... are some of the most poetically brilliant lyrics of his career. Really great stuff.

And his voice and guitar playing have never sounded better.

Its great news that even in today's market the album is selling *very* well... #1 Rock album in America and his first #1 album in the United Kingdom in over 26 years.

What a crowning achievement for an amazing career.

[LINK to complete album notes for more information](#)

[LINK to High Definition Audio Version on HDTracks](#)

[LINK to Amazon purchase](#) [LINK to iTunes purchase](#)

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