

The Fierce Terrain: A Friendship and Alliance

I will leave it to others to memorialize, to exalt into the heavens someone who wouldn't have wanted it. Paul Barrere was my band mate, my friend, someone I leaned on and occasionally pushed away. We spent a good measure of our lives engaged in the art of making and playing music with a band that could have only been conjured in a dream. But it was all too real. Little Feat was the one thing that could collectively bring us all together for the purpose of creating something with purpose, our place of refuge and exploration, of comfort, of dismay, and of ultimately what Paul might have called Home Ground.

I met Paul in the summer of 1969 at Lowell George's rustic home, tucked a bit off Rowena Avenue in Los Feliz. The story of Paul auditioning to play bass with Little Feat is well documented, but what isn't as evident, or wasn't to me at the time, was just how well he played guitar. Three years later, following the recording of *Sailin' Shoes* for Warner Brothers, Lowell alluded that he needed someone to take over some of the guitar duties in Little Feat. He wanted to concentrate more on playing slide—I thought he also wanted to spend more time writing, and having another person in the band might give him more freedom to pursue that and other avenues. Richie Hayward told me about a warehouse in downtown L.A. where Paul would be performing and that we should check him out. That evening Paul Barrere was tearing up the stage with some remarkably aggressive riffs on the guitar. He had a command of the blues that floored me. Richie and I took one look at each other and smiled. Little Feat is shrouded in myth, of course, so there were many roads and scenarios as to how Paul joined the band, and given how life works, they all probably aligned with his becoming the second guitarist. Myth gives way to reality, though, and it wasn't merely a matter of keeping Lowell happy; Richie and I had to embrace whomever came in, as well. Paul more than exceeded our standards. It was obvious to us he should be in Little Feat. Paul felt the same way.

The miles upon miles and time warps that envelop 50 years of knowing someone, the sharing of life's fortunes and missteps, is what brought me to a convulsion of tears following the second to the last show of our 50th Anniversary tour, October 26, 2019. Leaving yet another hotel—I had been away from home for three months—I saw my friend and manager Cameron Sears standing outside the bus. After putting my luggage in the bay, I came back around to ask if he had any news on Paul. He solemnly told me Paul had passed away at 1:15 that morning. I had been dreading the news ever since he had had to cancel coming out on what would be the last leg of the tour. The cliché that our lives pass before our eyes before we die might hold some truth, but I can tell you that Paul's passing left me with a kaleidoscopic montage of his and my life, interrupted, by life unfolding in real-time. Images of Paul and I breaking down in tears after the tribute gig to Lowell at the Forum in Los Angeles; surfing with Bert Toulotte on the East Coast; playing golf in Essen, Germany, with older club members and their Lolita-like caddies; taping a jam at our rehearsal room near Cahuenga and Barham, where we somehow spontaneously and simultaneously played a series of licks that came out of the ether, accompanied by our looks of utter disbelief as to just how we had accomplished that, while much later inserting them into what became "Day At the Dog Races"; the drive to his house discussing putting Little Feat back together in 1986, resulting in *Let It Roll* in 1988; plans and

more plans; one of our last calls about his health, his concerns for everyone in the band and his hopes for rejoining us again at some point.

The fierce terrain we were enjoined in over these 50 years was reflected in our music, in our journey, and in our understanding that none of it would be easy. Honesty is not always benign, but it is necessary if you are to be truthful to yourself and others. That honesty translates into the songs we wrote, which is why they resonate with so many people. Paul touched many hearts and minds by sharing the gifts he possessed. We have the songs, his voice and all the inflections he commanded, his incredible musical sense as a player, whether playing a searing and soaring slide part or a gentle acoustic guitar. He was a master at rhythm and creating stellar parts to songs of almost any genre. I still can hear the laughter in his voice, still feel the reverberations over misunderstandings, along with knowing that throughout it all we were brothers. I know well the intensity of who he was as a musician, as a man, and I honor that.

My tears are of sadness, both for him and for those of us that knew him, that loved him and that carry him in our hearts.

*The souls circle the sun
They play with the moon
Live amongst the stars
Their reflections on the river
Are gifts to your heart*

from Bill's River Blues

Bill Payne, Montana, October 29, 2019