

AVERY A ROCK OPERA

about a guy who writes a rock opera
by Carlton Walker

Avery is the story of Avery Mann, a musician and composer who writes a rock opera based on the medieval morality play *Everyman*. When a major record label drops him and the rock opera is shelved, Avery heads off for a rainforest trek in Belize, a tiny Caribbean nation in Central America. Just as he receives word that an independent record label is willing to release his rock opera, things take an existential turn when Guatemala invades Belize and Avery is caught behind the lines. It's eco-tourism with a twist!

Although described as a rock opera for simplicity's sake, *Avery* actually surveys a broader musical landscape. It shifts from rock to prog rock at random, with acoustic songs providing a buffer zone. And, like a play within a play, there's even a rock opera within a rock opera. Ultimately, *Avery* is a triumph of the human spirit with underlying parables on globalization, free speech, and the environment—all that in about an hour and fifteen minutes.

Avery's Theme

Sundog Days

Standing in the check-in line in London,
Alicia I couldn't keep my eyes off you.
And then you sat right down beside me.
Eight hours in the air but time just flew.

When the sunlight shines
on the high thin clouds,
it's like a rainbow without the rain.
An old man told me it brings good luck.
That must have been a sundog day.

I had finished with a photo shoot in Scotland
and you'd been on a walking tour in Wales.
Too shy to ask if I could call you,
I never dreamed you'd come to see me play.

When the sunlight shines
on the high thin clouds,
it's like a rainbow without the rain.
An old man told me it brings good luck.
That must have been a sundog day.

The ice storm gave me cabin fever
and lately it's been so cold and gray.
Such a relief that it's unseasonably warm
and I'm in the woods with you today.

See the sunlight shine
upon the high thin clouds
and how it makes a rainbow without the rain.
An old man told me that it brings good luck.
Oh, these will be our sundog days.

Avery The Preview

Excerpt from *Everyman*

Oh whom can I tell this sadness I know?
A journey's required. It's time I go.
Abandoned by all
I stand and I walk alone.
Oh how I dread to account for my soul.
Fellowship is a fair-weather friend
as are kinsmen in the end.

I counted on Goods to give some relief.
They failed me the most;
they served me the least.
Ashamed of myself,
am I doomed to Hell? Oh no.
Who can advise me? Who serves me well?
I'll turn to Good-Deeds in my time of need.
She's too weak to travel, too weak to speak.

Good-Deeds lies cold in the ground.
Everyman's sins have weighted her down.
I understand you've been summoned
to stand Everyman, stand before God.

I'll walk with you on your journey
for a reckoning, but I am so weak.

Your book of works and deeds lies empty
void of entries at your feet.

Good-Deeds please help me
in my time of need
or else I am damned for eternity.

And so to face his most dreadful reckoning:
Knowledge, sister of Good-Deeds
accompanies Everyman as his guide.

In good condition and spirits too,
Everyman and companions
continue on to the cleansing
River of Confession.

Not Gonna Beat Myself Up Anymore

Did you ever get what you wanted
and then lose it just like that?
Well, Texonn Multinational
has reared its ugly head.
It's the kind of corporation
that devours us in the end.
Now they've bought my record label out
and they don't care for dissidents.

So when I played a recent rally
for the good ship Placid Seas
and its environmental mission—well,
that's not what Texonn envisions.

So the album won't be coming out,
no rock opera *Everyman*.
When it got dropped,
I sank like a rock into the depths of despair.
I did some things I'd like to forget
I drank for days on end.
No wonder I drove Alicia away.
My life's an awful mess.

Express yourself and you pay the price;
the CEO's aren't pleased.
I sang my song and with the stroke of a pen
my life just turned to shit.

But I'm not gonna beat myself up anymore
'cause that is not what God put me here for.
No I'm not gonna beat myself up anymore
'cause that is not what God put me here for.

Think about the hero as he rolls a giant stone
up the mountain to the top and there he lets it go
happily—such absurdity. I wasn't born to fail.
It's just that art and corporations
can't be balanced on this scale.

I hear people say, "There's Avery Mann.
He blew his only chance."
"What happened to him?"
"With the stroke of a pen
his life just turned to shit."

But I'm not gonna beat myself up anymore
'cause that is not what God put me here for.
No I'm not gonna beat myself up anymore
'cause that is not what God put me here for.

Did you ever get what you wanted
and then lose it just like that?
With the stroke of a pen it happens again:
your life has turned to shit...just like that.

I've Enjoyed This Enough For Now

Time for hiatus,
a trek in Belize.
I'll check in now and then
to see what's the deal.

I hear challenges build character.
I'm a character certainly.
I wish that it wouldn't be better.
I've enjoyed this enough for now.

Getting picked up and dropped
made me a better man.
That's what I tell myself.
I'm not fooling anyone.

I hear challenges build character.
I'm a character certainly.
I wish that it wouldn't be better.
I've enjoyed this enough for now.

Here in the rainforest
is where I can breathe.
One phone call once a week,
that's too much for me.

I hear challenges build character.
I'm a character certainly.
I wish that it wouldn't be better.
I've enjoyed this enough for now.

Hot 'n' Humid Jungle

As we stand upon the pyramid,
we cannot help but wonder
how the Maya civilization rose
in a hot 'n' humid jungle.
A jaguar cried out in the night
as we walked up to the ruins
where the ghosts of several Maya chieftains
gathered in the plaza.

What were you thinking?
What did you do?
Well I guess it came as no surprise
that the prophecies came true.

The pyramid's covered by tropical growth.
The Maya once lived here,
but where did they go?
The jungle keeps secrets.
This time-obsessed race
left us their temples
and vanished without leaving a trace.

Collapse of the empire is hard to explain.

Was it civil disorder?
Did they have enough rain?
The hieroglyphs tell us,
but we cannot read
'cause the Spanish conquistadors
burned libraries and murdered their priests.

What were you thinking?
What did you do?
Well I guess it came as no surprise
that the prophecies came true.

Is That You Avery?

Is that you Avery?
We hoped we'd hear from you.
We've found a label,
a perfect fit for you.
It's an independent
and this is going to work.
You'll get attention,
the kind that you deserve.

The rock opera Everyman will be famous.
Yes, I can feel it deep in my soul.
'Cause this time things
are going to be different.
Yes, I can feel it.
Oh I just know.

We need you up here,
so get the next flight home
to sign the contract
and then we'll book some shows.

The rock opera Everyman will be famous.
Yes, I can feel it deep in my soul.
'Cause this time things
are going to be different.
Yes, I can feel it.
Oh I just know.

There's one more message.
Alicia called for you.
She asked about you.
She said she misses you.
And when you get back
would you call her please?
So how's that Avery?
You glad you talked to me?

Dreams come true in love and rock and roll.
They do eventually.
I'm grateful Lord for everything I have
and all you do for me.

The Road to Belmopan

All the phones are out of order
here along the western border.
They came across at dawn
and closed the road to Belmopan.

I'm supposed to be somewhere today.
From the looks of things
my plans have changed.

I've heard this talk of war for years.
Seemed like unsubstantiated fears.
Something happened long ago.
A lot of details I don't know.

Now the headline reads
"Guatemala Invades Belize!"
There's no way out that I can see.

I've seen maps in Guatemala;
they looked wrong
as if Belize was really theirs all along.
Something happened long ago.
A lot of details I don't know.
I'm supposed to be somewhere today.

The Anguish of Avery

Now this war is raging
and I'm caught behind the lines.
It'll take some drastic measures
to get out of here alive.

And would Abraham sacrifice Isaac?
What anguish he must have known,
the knowledge that in your decision
you, you're all alone.

With consequences envisioned
I'll walk out. I just can't stay here.
If the invaders don't get me,
there's snakes and jaguars to fear.

And would Abraham sacrifice Isaac?
What anguish he must have known,
the knowledge that in your decision
you, you're all alone.

I'll hack my way through jungle.
A map? Oh hell, what's that?
A trail—the stuff of legend.
This compass is all that I get.

And would Abraham sacrifice Isaac?
What anguish he must have known,
the knowledge that in your decision
you, you're all alone.

Incidents of Travel

I'm Alive!

I cross the Maya Mountains,
the trade routes of the ancients long ago,
so long ago.

Take shelter in their ruins,
an existential hero, I'm alone, all alone.
No food and not much water,
before long I'll be crawling on my knees,
crawling on my knees.

But out there in the distance
could it be a village? Oh please,
oh God please.

My second wind kicks in.
I'm energized again.
After all that I've been through
I've survived.
Yes, I'm alive!

I've got cuts and swollen ankles.
My clothes are torn to shreds.
I lost track of what day it was
and I never really slept,
but I survived
and I'm alive!

A jaguar cried out in the night,
but I'm fine, I survived.
And wild boars passed in front of me,
but I'm all right.
They went on by.

Now I've rested up a day or two,
even slept in a real bed.
Even this little fishing village
is quite a contrast to where I've been.

No flights in and no flights out.
At first I was optimistic,
but now I have my doubts.
Ah the village scene,
it's okay for right now.

Then I heard some talk
about a guy named Captain Pete.
His crew couldn't make it back down here
because of the war.
He's got a sailboat to deliver
and I've signed on with him.

Now we've made it past the reef.
And so far we've got decent wind.
Out in open ocean,
and it's finally sinking in...

I'm alive!
I've survived!
From the war zone to the jungle,
wild boars and jaguars,
sailing school paid off and I'm alive!
I've survived
and I'll be all right.

North by Northeast

Collision Course

I can sense there's danger lurking.
The dream I had last night,
was it premonition?
Or merely a sailor's superstition?

Why am I in the water?
What on earth did we hit?
I've been knocked overboard!
And it looks like it's the end!

Breaking Water

Is this how it ends?
Like it begins?
I had a good run.
I wish it had been a longer one.

But this crushing blow
is the kind of hit that takes away all hope.
Breaking water I was born.
Now, reluctantly I return.

Kindred and friends,
looks like I'll never see you again.
So this is the price
I pay for how I've lived my life.

So much has happened since I've been away
and I have a slight situation today.
I have no regrets for the choices I made.
It's the reward for these risks that I take.

Alicia we tried.
Things might have worked out if I hadn't died.
I hope that you know
I would have followed wherever you go.

We tested the waters of each other's souls,
caught in a riptide of things that went wrong.
The letter I wrote that you never received,
it's so hard to accept it was not meant to be.

Oh whom can I tell
this sadness I know?
A journey's required.
It's time I go.

The Spiral

Avery The Movie

So now Avery we celebrate your life.
That's why Avery we sold the movie rights.

The Return of Avery

Drifting in the water,
how long it's still unclear.
Now resting and recovering
it's hard to fathom what I hear.

What caused the collision,
what the hell knocked me overboard
was Texonn brand defoliant
in convenient 55-gallon drum.

There was time before the ship went down
for Captain Pete to send a Mayday out.
They rescued him, then they found me
unconscious drifting in the sea.

Near death and delirious
An angel's voice was what I thought I heard.
"It's not your time yet Avery,"
familiar sound to the words.

Alicia I could not believe
had volunteered aboard the Placid Seas
tracking smugglers of mahogany,
cut down illegally.

The world finally hears the truth:
the Central American Institute,
a Texonn-financed war machine
for Guatemala to invade Belize.

Clear-cut and burn the rainforest,
dam the rivers, flood the valleys:
Texonn Multinational
Corporation strategy.

Contracts awarded secretly,
Belize would be company property.
Deals made in the backroom.
The nightmare that nearly came true.

Then earthquakes hit Guatemala City.
End result, the plan was foiled.
In chaos plots unraveled.
Uncovered documents reveal it all.

Meanwhile in the Caribbean,
boatloads of implements of war
and Texonn brand defoliant:

evidence dumped overboard.

The Placid Seas following undetected
sails up, lights and motor off,
environmental surveillance mission,
night-vision cameras caught it all.

I'm not like I used to be.
More than ever I resolve
to stand, gotta stand for something,
'cause God loves the dissident!

Follow Your Bliss

You're standing there by the water.
Open your eyes. You can drink.
Why not do what you want to?
It's all in the way that you think.

Cautious fool, scared to lose, what's with you?
Same old tune by the rule, how'd you do?

Too many people under pressure
stay that way until they die.
When the packaging outweighs the product,
you know it's time to redesign.

Cautious fool, scared to lose, what's with you?
Same old tune by the rule, how'd you do?

Won't you listen? Pay attention.
Be yourself. Ignore convention.
Count your gifts, not what you missed,
and follow your bliss!

Being different has its drawbacks.
Oftentimes it's downright hard.
Perseverance leads to triumph.
It's time to claim your just reward.

Cautious fool, scared to lose, what's with you?
Same old tune by the rule, how'd you do?

Won't you listen? Pay attention.
Be yourself. Ignore convention.
Count your gifts, not what you missed,
and follow your bliss!

The Boy Who Got Everything

What an emotional roller coaster ride.
And how about the time that I almost died!
Voted "Best New Artist of the Year."
Living happily ever after with my dear.

Dreams come true in love and rock and roll.
Dreams come true in love and rock
and love and rock and love and rock and roll!

Composed and produced by Carlton Walker.

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at Housequake Productions, Nashville, Tennessee.

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carltonwalker.com.

Carlton Walker: vocals, bass, bass pedals, flute,
keyboards, programming

Jeff Malash: lead and rhythm guitars, 6-string and 12-
string acoustic guitars, cello

Ben Weaver: drums, percussion

John Cisco: violin, viola, mandolin, keyboards on “The
Road to Belmopan,” rhythm guitar on “Avery the
Movie,” lead guitar on “Follow Your Bliss”

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