

As a followup to his ambitious orchestral project *Black Dahlia*, an evocative reading of James Ellroy's neo-crime novel which took its inspiration from the true story of Elizabeth Short's gruesome murder in 1947 Los Angeles, Belden tells his own story on *Transparent Heart*. With his new Animation lineup, consisting of young students he recruited from his own alma mater, the University of North Texas (23-year-old keyboardist Roberto Verastegui, 24-year-old bassist Jacob Smith, 32-year-old trumpeter Pete Clagett and 19-year-old drummer Matt Young), Belden unveils a dark narrative of Manhattan as seen through the musical diary he has composed over 29 years of living in the Big Apple.

An imposing electronic noir masterwork, *Transparent Heart* travels from Belden's initial awestruck impressions of the city ("Terra Incognita") to his feelings of foreboding ("Urbanoia") and hope ("Cry in the Wind") as a city dweller on Manhattan's Upper West Side, to the pervasive angst of post-9/11 Manhattan ("Seven Towers," "Provocaterrorism"). He also addresses the mass exodus of artists from the city ("Vanishment") and concludes his musical memoir with the clash of the social classes manifested in the current Occupy Wall Street movement ("Occupy!"). Drawing on elements of electronica and the prevailing influence of Miles Davis' turbulent post-*Bitches Brew* electric phase, Belden has concocted a powerful, provocative suite of music that is charged by the intensely driving, highly intuitive playing of his energetic young Animation bandmates.

"This record is not a jazz record, it's about my life in Manhattan," says Belden. "And things have been very tense here since 9/11. In essence, the music on *Transparent Heart* is a reflection of that, and not of jazz tradition or jazz history. So what you have here is a way of looking at Manhattan through music."

The Grammy Award-winning composer-arranger-producer-bandleader explains that the concept for *Transparent Heart* has been in the making for more than 30 years. "My first trip to Manhattan came in 1979 when I was with Woody Herman's band. I'll never forget seeing all the tall buildings and how they created a canyon effect. That's 'Terra Incognita.' Then after moving here in 1984, I lived in a hardcore neighborhood where you look out your window every day and you see somebody selling a piece of clothing that they stole to buy a rock of crack, you see women prostituting themselves or children selling drugs on the street because their mommy and daddy need the money to buy crack. And you hear about people getting stabbed and killed in your neighborhood all the time. That's 'Urbanoia.'"

Belden explains that "Cry in the Wind," with Clagett's muted trumpet carrying the melancholy theme, comes directly from a personal experience. "One night I

was sitting at home – my studio apartment was on the ground floor of the building I lived in – and I heard the voice of a woman crying for help. So I took my phone out there, saw this woman who had apparently just been stabbed and called 911. I asked her, ‘Can I help you?’ and she reached up and grabbed my hand and wasn’t going to let it go until the ambulance got there. So I wrote this piece about that experience. And it was antithetical to the Kitty Genovese story from the 1960s, where a woman was stabbed outside of her house in Queens and screamed for help, but no one came to her aid. But by the ‘80s, people from my generation began gentrifying the neighborhood a little bit and we looked at street violence differently. And I was able to help this woman live because I cared. It’s about hearing the cries in the wind that you hear all the time in the city. There’s always somebody here in desperate need of help. And you can hear that extreme sense of loneliness and helplessness in this song.”

The darkly propulsive title track echoes the hard-hitting production that Bill Laswell brought to Herbie Hancock’s 1983 hit single “Rock It.” As the native of Goose Creek, South Carolina recalls, “When I got to New York City in 1984, I was totally into Laswell and was experimenting with multiple drum machines and making demos that were using that robotic kind of drum sound, and nobody in jazz dug it at all. They hated Laswell, they hated ‘Rock-It,’ so they thought I was an idiot. Over time I reshaped the underpinning of the song. I recorded it with Joe Chambers a year and a half later, then we recorded it in 2000 with Tim Hagens and now we just recorded it again with this edition of Animation.”

“Seven Towers” is Belden’s reaction to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. But as he points out, “9/11 wasn’t just about the Twin Towers, there were seven towers there that were affected. And this tune recreates my own timeline of 9/11, from the time I was first aware of it to the time when the second plane hit the South Tower. I was there. I watched it happen downtown and have video footage that I shot. So in a sense, it’s a real personal, autobiographical piece. It starts with the NORAD radio broadcast, where they’re trying to determine what that object is in the air. They call the Pentagon to find out, and it turns out that it’s an airplane that has struck the North Tower. And you hear the NYPD and NYFD respond...the emergency response crews. It’s very haunting.”

“Provocaterrorism” is about the immediate aftermath of 9/11. “A lot of the small business that were so dependent on the whole World Trade Center complex just died. It was the beginning of a Darwinian approach to economic survivability in Manhattan. And ‘Vanishment’ refers to the exodus of artists and musicians who couldn’t afford to live there anymore to a point where the localized creative culture in Manhattan is gone now. There are people now who work here in the clubs who don’t live here, for the most part. And then you have this influx of college students who have no real attachment to the city. So suddenly, the

Manhattan of post-9/11 is very different from the Manhattan that existed when I moved here in 1984.”

The final track, “Occupy!,” is the most intense and harrowing of the Belden’s musical memoir. His turbulent ode to the Occupy Wall Street movement is imbued with the sounds of screams and violence in the streets in the clash between protesters and police. As Belden explains, “All the crazy social engineering and social displacement in Manhattan is summed up in the occupy movement. These are people who are angry and frustrated and they have nowhere else to address their grievances, so they take to the streets. They are essentially declaring war on Manhattan. And the other occupy movements in other cities are declaring war on Manhattan in absentia.”

For Belden, *Transparent Heart* is his method of using music as a tool to get people to think about social issues. “Why can’t music be returned to its place as a social engineer or a reflection of society that might provoke thought? That’s in the great tradition of Wagner, Debussy, Satie, Copland. Stravinsky was a provocateur. Shostakovich is my role model for this because he was able to put into music the terror of the Soviet empire. That’s where I’m coming from. This record is not about tunes and solos and arrangements, it’s a way of telling a story that has something to do with my life.”

Adds the acclaimed producer, “What I learned from doing *Miles From India* (2008) and *Miles Español* (2011) is that I’m not Indian and I’m not Spanish. And I can’t tell Miles’ story anymore. With *Black Dahlia* (2001) I was telling Elizabeth Short’s story. *Transparent Heart* is my story.”