



Bio information: **BEAT CIRCUS**

Title: **DREAMLAND** (Cuneiform Rune 264)

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FILE UNDER: ROCK / POST-ROCK / POST-CABARET / NEW WEIRD AMERICANA

“Huddled masses approaching America at the turn of the century saw first not the Statue of Liberty, nor the Brooklyn Bridge, nor even the breathtaking new skyscraper... What they saw was... the vast new set of wonders sprawled along the sands..."

...Coney Island...made up of three great amusement parks, Steeplechase, and Luna Park, and Dreamland; each of them adorned with that other new phenomenon of the age, the electric lightbulb, so that when the sun went down the whole island looked as if it were strung with frozen pools of fire, spinning and plunging and whirling in place. ..."

An amusement – there was the holy hell of it. What other city, what other nation, had ever thrown so much time and money and care into public amusement?"
– Kevin Baker, www.kevinbaker.info

“...tis a tale of dreams and nightmares, the conscious mind and the subconscious mind, responsibility and consequence.”

– Brian Carpenter, Beat Circus

Produced by **Martin Bisi**, **Beat Circus' Dreamland** is an astonishing CD: a dark American epic, cinematic in its scope. It is the first part in a **Weird American Gothic** trilogy of song cycles written by singer/songwriter and multi-instrumentalist **Brian Carpenter**, the leader of **Beat Circus** – a band aligned with Boston's internationally recognized post-cabaret music scene (**The Dresden Dolls**, **Reverend Glasseye** and **HUMANWINE**). The *Dreamland* song cycle is based on historical fact – real people and events in the turn of the century **Coney Island** amusement park of the same name – interwoven with Carpenter's fictional tale of an impoverished, alcoholic gold miner who makes a pact with the devil before fleeing eastward to work in Dreamland's sideshows. In Carpenter's own words: “...tis a tale of dreams and nightmares, the conscious mind and the subconscious mind, responsibility and consequence.” To bring his historical fiction to life, Carpenter created a 150 page musical score that blends Vaudeville, cabaret, parlor songs and other old-time, pre-jazz American popular musical forms with modern composition and post-rock. The resulting music is a surreal new-folk Americana, resounding and brutal in musical and emotional power. Blurring the lines between past and present, fact and fiction, nightmares and the American Dream, **Beat Circus' Dreamland** exists in a perverse and magical netherworld, where reality shifts like sand on Coney Island's wave-washed shore.

The historical facts underlying *Dreamland* read like surreal fiction. The original **Dreamland**, one of three grand amusement parks that forged Coney Island's identity in the early 1900's as America's recreational escape, was built by Tammany Hall-connected businessman **William H. Reynolds**. It opened in 1904, a Utopian vision of all-white buildings dominated by a grandiose, beacon-lit tower that gleamed by day and glowed at night – a novel, awe-inspiring spectacle made possible by America's newest invention, a million electric lights. Designed to entertain under an educational pretense, Dreamland was in fact “a surreal and macabre world of horrors and delights” that offered the public exotic (Alpine villages, Venetian canals) and improbable locales (a Lilliputian Village built for 300 dwarves), dangerous rides (the deadly Rough Rider) and ‘scientific’ and ‘technical’ exhibits (burning tenements featuring real New York City firefighters in action, a display of premature triplets in incubators). A religious and moral undercurrent coursed through it all; historian **Adam Sandy** described Dreamland as “the Bible brought to Brooklyn with hints of showmanship.” The park's entrance – an arch formed by gigantic angel wings and capped by a colossal Statue of Liberty crown (America as dream-land, mankind's gateway to redemption and rebirth!) – doubled as **Creation**, an attraction that took visitors on a journey through Genesis and the creation of the world. Another attraction, “opened by a fan of sobriety hoping to scare customers straight,” took visitors on a boat trip to Hell. In 1911, under **Samuel Gumpertz's** new management, Dreamland closed to remodel and repaint its buildings in riotous color. At 2 AM on May 27th, the night before re-opening day, a fire broke out in **Hell Gate** during repairs and spread rapidly, burning Dreamland to the ground. Never rebuilt, Dreamland was replaced by a freak show and other, smaller attractions; today the **New York Aquarium** sits on Dreamland's site. Dreamland has been commemorated in a documentary film by **Ric Burns**, a post card collection by **Richard Snow**, historical books and websites by **Adam Sandy** and others, and a ‘historical novel’, *Dreamland*, by **Kevin Baker**. A lovingly compiled tribute, **Beat Circus' Dreamland** may well be the first musical narrative/concept album devoted to Dreamland's colorful past. Ironically, **Beat Circus** completed the CD in 2007 during what the *Gotham Gazette* called “Coney Island's Summer of Reckoning”, as massive redevelopment plans were unveiled to erase all physical character – and *characters* – from Coney Island's carnival past.

When he was 18, **Brian Carpenter** left his parental home in the Deep South and joined a travelling carnival. Raised by Southern Baptists, his childhood had been spent in rural **Florida**, singing in church choirs and listening to old-time and shape note gospel singers such as **Johnny Cash**, **The Carter Family** and **Albert E. Brumley**. He began playing classical trumpet when he was 12 and played in school orchestras and jazz bands. In 1990, after his carnival adventure, Carpenter moved to Gainesville to study engineering at the University of Florida, arriving as serial killer **Danny Rollins** terrorized the campus. He became a key player in **Gainesville's** early-90s music scene, playing in **Less Than Jake**, **Aleka's Attic**, **Avi Bortnick's What It Is**, **Sister Hazel**, and other bands, and most notably, founding the **Gainesville Jazz & Pop Festival**, one of the biggest creative music festivals in the Southeast. Befriending avant-garde saxophonist **Sam Rivers** (who later played at Carpenter's wedding) and NY-based slide trumpeter/arranger **Steven Bernstein**, Carpenter immersed himself in free jazz, avant-garde and creative music, listening to **Albert Ayler**, **Sun Ra**, **Henry Threadgill** and **Harry Partsch**. In 1994, Carpenter formed the instrumental ensemble **Bluebird** and in 1998 he formed **Beat Science**, a punk jazz ensemble that included bassist **Doug Mathews** and drummer **Anthony Cole** from the **Sam Rivers Trio**.

In December 2000, Carpenter moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts to direct a movie documentary (an ongoing project) about the life and legacy of saxophonist **Albert Ayler**, the free jazz legend whose 34-year-old body surfaced in New York's East River in 1970. From 2001 to 2005 he produced **Free Association**, a critically acclaimed radio show on WZBC-FM that featured his interviews with **Dave Douglas**, **Joe Morris**, **William Parker**, **Marc Ribot**, **Roswell Rudd**, **John Tchicai**, and other jazz innovators. It also featured his interviews with rock iconoclasts such as **Reverend Glasseye** and accordionist/composer **Alec K. Redfearn**, leader of Providence's **The Eyesores**, whom Carpenter had met in an improv group,

Session One, in 2001. In 2003, Carpenter produced a special 4-hour feature for Free Association, co-hosted with Boston filmmaker **Matthew Ryan**, on music for psychological horror films.

Carpenter formed his Boston band **Beat Circus** (originally called **Beat Science**) in 2002. Featuring a six-piece lineup of Carpenter on trumpet and slide trumpet, tubist **Ron Caswell**, accordionist **Alec K. Redfearn**, banjoist **Brandon Seabrook**, saxophonist **Jim Hobbs**, and drummer **Jerome Deupree**, Beat Circus released its first CD, *Ringleaders Revolt*, in 2004 on Innova Recordings. A CD of instrumental circus music and group improvisations, the *Village Voice* described it as “a riotous collage of circus and burlesque and tango, which suggest affinities with **Willem Breuker**, though there's clearly something original going on.” *Creative Loafing* remarked, “Beat Circus could be the house band for the dark carnival in **Ray Bradbury's** *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, its full-length CD *Ringleaders Revolt* the accompaniment to some faded old black-and-white cartoon...” A song from *Ringleaders Revolt* was indeed later used in a film score; Brooklyn-based director **Doug Lenox** used “**Big Top Suite**” for *Quincy & Althea*, a film he set in New Orleans’ apocalyptic, post-Katrina landscape that recently won “Best Live Action Short Film” at the 2007 Memphis International Film Festival.

In early 2005 Carpenter reorganized **Beat Circus**, envisioning himself on pump organ with a small orchestra backing “dark narratives of Deadwood saloons, gangsters from The Bowery, Coney Island sideshows, and the Santa Fe Railway.” This second incarnation of Beat Circus was a nine-piece group that included, besides Carpenter, several long-time members – tubist **Ron Caswell (Slavic Soul Party)**, banjoist **Brandon Seabrook (Naftule’s Dream)**, and accordionist **Alec K. Redfearn (The Eyesores)** – and introduced numerous new musicians, including drummer **Matt McLaren** (also of The Eyesores), violinist **Käthe Hostetter (Bindlestiff Family Cirkus)**, cellist **Julia Kent (Antony & the Johnsons)**, trombonist **Curtis Hasselbring (Golem)** and saxophonist **Briggan Krauss (Sex Mob)**. Carpenter began working on *Dreamland*, a radical departure from his prior improv-based work, featuring a 150 page score for 12 musicians containing narrative songs and through-composed instrumental pieces, each possessing unique instrumentation and voicings. Carpenter based his macabre narratives on historical figures from the Coney Island theme park and on a play he wrote about “Johnny, an alcoholic poverty-stricken gold miner in the Dakota territory who loses his arm in a mining accident. One night Johnny makes a pact with the devil to get his arm back by killing his wife and escapes to New York City to join a traveling sideshow at Coney Island’s turn-of-the-century theme park Dreamland.” Beat Circus began recording *Dreamland* in 2006 in NYC, assembling extra material into an EP of modern classical music, noise and experimental music, titled *Blood Boy*. In the winter of 2006/2007, Beat Circus toured the East Coast with Reverend Glasseye.

Cuneiform Records is proud to now release *Dreamland*, Beat Circus’ second CD and the first installment of Carpenter’s Weird American Gothic trilogy. A full-length recording that contains 16 cuts of lyrical songs and through-composed instrumental music, *Dreamland* was produced by legendary NYC producer **Martin Bisi (Sonic Youth, Swans, The Dresden Dolls, Barbez)**, mixed by **Martin Bisi** and mastered by **Fred Kevorkian** at Avatar Studios in NYC. It features a pantheon of long and short-term collaborators, including the nine-piece Beat Circus and numerous special guests. The musicians on *Dreamland* include:

Steven Berson (cello)
Holly Brewer (vocals)
Brian Carpenter (vocals, harmonica, harmonium, toy piano, drums, trumpet, slide trumpet, tambourine, Mellotron, outside talker, stomping)
Ron Caswell (tuba)
Brian Dewan (electric zither; also did cover illustrator)
Frank Difficult (electronics)
DJ Hazard (chain gang, outside talker)
Orion Rigel Domnisse (vocals)
Curtis Hasselbring (trombone)
Michael Hearst (theremin) (**One Ring Zero**)
Käthe Hostetter (violin)

Chris Jenkins (viola)
Julia Kent (cello)
Briggan Krauss (alto & baritone saxophones)
Matt McLaren (drums, washboard, percussion/stomping)
M. McNiss (chorus vocals, chain gang, outside talker)
Alec K. Redfearn (accordion, jaw harp, stomping)
Todd Robbins (piano) ragtime pianist & sideshow historian: Exec. Director of Coney Island USA & star of www.americancarny.com
Brandon Seabrook (banjo, mandolin)
Skip Shirey (bells, extended pennywhistle) multi-instrumentalist
Jesse Sparhawk (harp)
Helen Yee (violin)

Filled with unforgettable melodies and dark, gripping narratives, the music on *Dreamland* is as seductive as absinthe. But it is not only the music that is intoxicating; as a physical package, the *Dreamland* CD is a gorgeous object in and of itself, beautifully designed and lovingly researched and assembled. It contains a 12-page, full-color booklet that provides song titles, musician credits and lyrics (where applicable) for each track, gorgeously laid out amidst original artwork and historical photos whose visuals expand and augment the meaning and mood of each song. **Dave Bias** designed and laid out the package and accompanying booklet. The original cover art was created by **Brian Dewan**, a NY-based multimedia artist/musician/filmmaker who designs instruments ranging from analog synthesizers [www.dewanatron.com] to electric zithers (which he plays on *Dreamland*) to medieval instruments inspired by **Hieronymous Bosch** (which he played on *The Blind Spot, Alec K. Redfearn & The Eyesores’* recent Cuneiform CD). Dewan also creates works on paper (including the famous “flying victrola” illustrated for Neutral Milk Hotel’s *In The Aeroplane Over The Sea*), makes films, releases solo recordings, and performs with numerous musicians including Alec K. Redfearn & The Eyesores, **Flaming Fire**, **They Might be Giants**, the **Raymond Scott Orchestrett** and more. The gorgeous visuals supplied by Bias and Dewan augment the meaning and mood of the music on *Dreamland*, and serve to further blur the line between historical fact and artistic fiction behind the *Dreamland* tale.

After completing the *Dreamland* project in Summer 2007, Carpenter began composing a new series of Weird American Gothic tales that revolve around children, fatherhood, dreams, revenge and redemption, and Southern Gothic stories of “The Grotesque”. To bring these new tales to life Carpenter spawned the third incarnation of Beat Circus, which toured the Northeast US in August 2007, playing with **HUMANWINE**, **Ara Anderson’s (Tin Hat)** band, and **Iron & The Albatross**, and performed at Cambridge’s **American Repertory Theatre** with Skip Shirey. This Beat Circus lineup includes, besides **Carpenter** (vocals, throat, pump organ, harmonica, trumpet, slide trumpet) and **Ron Caswell** (tuba), new members **Paran Amiranazari** (violin, vocals), **Paul Dilley** (double bass, acoustic guitar; from **Reverend Glasseye**, **HUMANWINE**), **Doug LaRosa** (trombone) **Ches Smith** (drums; from **Secret Chiefs 3**, **Xiu Xiu**), **Andrew Stern** (electric guitar, tenor banjo; from **Naftule's Dream**, **Fat Little Bastard**) and **Jordan Voelker** (viola, vocals). To celebrate the release of *Dreamland*, Beat Circus (with **Gavin McCarthy** on drums & percussion) will tour the East Coast for two weeks in February 2008.

In addition to Beat Circus, Carpenter also leads **Ghost Train Orchestra**, a ten-piece instrumental spin-off of Beat Circus that performs old-time vaudeville-style music, including late 1920s hothouse jazz from Chicago and Harlem, Tin Pan Alley songs, bawdyhouse burlesque grinds, and sideshow pieces for on-stage performers. Formed in 2005 to record Carpenter’s score for a **Lorelei Pepi** cartoon, *Happy & Gay*, Ghost Train Orchestra has

performed numerous shows at **The Regent Theater**, a historic vaudeville house in Arlington, MA. Besides leading Beat Circus and Ghost Train Orchestra, Carpenter plays accordion, trumpets, and harmonium in the junk-circus-punk band **HUMANWINE**, which he joined in 2005.

For more information, please visit Beat Circus online at: www.beatcircus.net & www.myspace.com/beatcircus

WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT BEAT CIRCUS:

"Beat Circus has created a singular intriguing sonic identity by filtering certain bizarre old-time American and European pre-jazz styles through a progressive contemporary fearlessness." – *Weekly Planet*

"A fantasy locale of carnival nostalgia and Victrola nightmares..." – *Philadelphia City Paper*

"Their narrative songs evoke cabaret, Wild West saloons, circus sideshows, and Old World gypsies...but the prodigious musicianship and stylistic miscegenation is all modern; the results, refreshingly entertaining." – *All About Jazz*

RINGLEADER'S REVOLT

INNOVA RECORDING

2004

Lineup: Brian Carpenter (trumpet, slide trumpet); Ron Caswell (tuba); Jerome Deupree (drums); Jim Hobbs (alto saxophone); Brandon Seabrook (tenor banjo); Alec K. Redfearn (accordion)

"...Beat Circus operates on a musical boundary hardly ever performed live or even heard on record. Their performances on this release...have a jumping dramatic flair with a clear – almost visual – goal that corresponds with the individual titles, as well as the overarching subject matter, which stands for salient moments during a circus show. ...

Because of its jazz era "oompa-oompa" swing core, "The Mack" might very well be one of the most readily decipherable cuts, although it's hardly predictable. It features an energetic and engaging series of solos from sax and banjo, as well as a slurred tuba solo, which has a verbal quality. Its coda is a free-for-all counterpoint.

Ringleader's Revolt, one of my preferred releases of 2004, is a premiere example of musical wittiness and unpredictability. After all, where else are you going to hear the metaphorical use of phrases such as "...aphids on a martini shaker..." or "...Like an army of living pogo sticks, they jack hammered their way to a new life..." but in a performance of "Escape From the Big House"?"

– Javier Antonio Quinones Ortiz, *All About Jazz*, May 2005, www.allaboutjazz.com

"...a great album. Imagine if you will an amalgam of circus music, funeral dirges, music for burlesque, tangos, and marches, with a serious edge. This is more than retro; it's much cooler than that. This is music from a fiction of the past, a crazy burlesque circus that would make Salvador Dali feel at home. ...It's music that would be as comfortable around the Squirrel Nut Zippers as it would be around Tom Waits.

The Beat Circus is chock full of great musicians. Really great musicians. Guys like drummer Jerome Deupree who was also the original drummer for Morphine, and the Either/Orchestra; Brandon Seabrook plays banjo/sampler and is also the guitarist of the critically acclaimed post-klezmer band Naftule's Dream (also on Innova); Jim Hobbs rocks the alto saxophone and leads the Fully Celebrated Orchestra...

Of course it's all ring-mastered by Boston stalwart, documentary filmmaker and slide trumpet player Brian Carpenter. ..."

– Editorial Review, *Amazon.com*

"...Things start cheerfully enough, with a big-top band overture that culminates in oohs and aahs from an admiring crowd, then erupts into a rapid-plucking, drum-stomping, horn-blasting good time... But then things begin to fall threateningly apart. ...Things start to get strange.

...Brian Carpenter's slide trumpet and Jim Hobbs' alto saxophone relay the underlying creepiness that looms beneath all those silly clowns and sparkling child acrobats. Soon, the greedy laugh of some ring-leading madman oozes through the sounds of Alec K. Redfearn's accordion, warbling with trepidation. ...

As the focus moves from dazzling tricksters to shady shysters, the music infects with the knowledge that beneath all the shiny goodness of the world, a scummy underbelly bristles with sin." – Celeste Sunderland, *All About Jazz*, March 2005, www.allaboutjazz.com

"Jon Garelick's top 10 jazz records of '04: 2. Slide-trumpeter Brian Carpenter and his three-ring-theatre-jazz troupe the Beat Circus emerged as a formidable virtuoso ensemble with their first CD, *The Ringleader's Revolt*..." – Jon Garelick, *The Boston Phoenix*, 2004

ARTICLES & INTERVIEWS

"...Beat Circus, led by singer-songwriter Brian Carpenter, describe themselves as "weird American Gothic," and it's hard to argue; imagine the result had Peter Murphy been abducted at birth by gypsies. Both gather in plenty of schizophrenically skilled musicians (drummer Ches Smith and Slavic Soul Party tube player Ron Caswell serve double duty). If there isn't a menacing top-hatted barker outside...I'll be sorely disappointed." –

Shaun Brady, *Philadelphia City Paper*, July 2007, www.citypaper.net

"...At first performing as Beat Science, they played loft parties, and going into a summer-long residency last year at the Lizard Lounge, they were a kind of free-jazz outfit, working around loose arrangements of Carpenter's themes, or jamming with guests like Roswell Rudd and dancers from the burlesque revival scene. Then, mid-summer, the Providence accordionist Alec K. Redfearn sat in. He was the final, defining character in Carpenter's evolving screenplay: "Alec added this whole Weimer-era dark, brooding sensibility." The band turned in a Fellini-esque direction, not merely in its musical allusions to Nino Rota, Kurt Weill, and the American circus music of Karl King but in its natural theatrical bent. Instead of writing loose, free-jazz arrangements, Carpenter began writing more tightly arranged pieces for specific collaborations with burlesque dancers, comedians, and actors. ...Beat Science had become the Beat Circus. ...

Ringleader's Revolt deploys the familiar oom-pahs of circus music, rearranges pieces by Weill and King, and even deconstructs Rodgers & Hammerstein's "The Lonely Goat Herd" from *The Sound of Music*. Seabrook's stunning banjo playing, which has a percussive bouzouki quality that...has nothing to do with bluegrass or Dixieland, is a tonic throughout. ...

But the show is still the thing. ...Carpenter...emphasizes, "We want it to be visual. We want to take risks. ...We want to keep people on their toes.""

– Jon Garelick, *The Boston Phoenix*, September 2004

“...Their music has often been described as Dark Carnival Music...songs about old world gypsies, carnivals and saloons sung through pipes and bullhorns, Russian waltzes, Spanish folk songs, bawdy burlesque grinds, funeral dirges, and experimentalism all jump-cut, braked, and accelerated to form a completely original sound. ...”
– *Tribe*, December 2005, tribes.tribe.net

“...Most acts coalesce around a songwriter...or when a group of good friends decides to make music together. Carpenter, a musical polymath who’s played everything from jazz to ska, took an opposite approach to starting his latest project: He went looking for the most interesting and iconoclastic players he could find, confident that their interaction would inspire an interesting and iconoclastic new sound.

“It was a process of really just going out to shows and trying to find people that really just blew me away,” Carpenter says. ...

The talents and widespread interests of these musicians, coupled with the somewhat timeless sounds of many of the instruments...quickly led Carpenter and company to a singularly intriguing sonic identity, one that filtered certain bizarre old-time American and European pre-jazz styles through a progressive contemporary fearlessness.

“I didn’t start out thinking that I wanted to do a circus band or a cabaret band or anything like that,” says Carpenter. “I was really just looking for musicians that had very strong personalities and didn’t sound like anything else. I brought them into the band, then I started writing for those people, and it ended up being The Beat Circus, this sort of Fellini-esque cabaret band. So it really came out of the musicians.”

The Beat Circus blends Vaudeville, polka, and Eastern European gypsy music with the sounds of the Big Top, the cabaret and improvisational post-jazz to come up with something both immediately familiar and eerily foreign, something equally engaging and disturbing. ...

When playing its home turf, the band is sometimes joined onstage by fire-eaters and other spectacular sideshow-style performers, creating a flashy, perilous world to match the music. ...”
– Scott Harrell, *Creative Loafing Tampa*, May 2005

“...Beat Science is a septet from Boston, with Brian Carpenter on slide trumpet, Jim Hobbs on alto saxophone and Charlie Kohlhaase on baritone saxophone; it’s a loose-limbed jazz group involving conducting of improvisers. ...” – *The New York Times*, “Pop and Jazz Guide,” February 2003

Additional information related to *DREAMLAND*:

“MEET ME TONIGHT IN DREAMLAND”

The waltz “**Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland**” became the theme song for Coney Island’s Dreamland. Composed by **Beth Slater Whitson** (lyrics) and **Leo Friedman** (music), its sheet music was published in Chicago in 1909. A popular hit, it sold over two million copies of sheet music after stage star **Reine Davies** sung it on NYC’s premier vaudeville stage while violinist **Vera Berliner** strolled down the center aisle, playing the chorus. In 1910, Columbia released the 78’ recording, *Meet Me To-Night In Dreamland* (Columbia 905, 1910), with vocalist **Henry Burr** (**Harry H. McClasky**). Additionally, **Judy Garland** sang “**Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland**” in her 1949 movie, *In the Good Old Summertime*, and it was also used in the 1953 movie, *The Eddie Cantor Story*. To hear the Henry Burr version, visit:

(<http://ia300108.us.archive.org/3/items/HenryBurr/HenryBurr-MeetMeTonightinDreamlandaboutDreamlandinConeyIsland1910a.mp3>)

CONEY ISLAND REDEVELOPMENT PLANS

In 2007, redevelopment plans were unveiled to replace the colorful, folksy remnants of Coney Island’s past with what *New York Magazine* called “The Incredibly Bold, Audaciously Cheesy, Jaw-Droppingly Vegasified, Billion-Dollar Glam-Rock Makeover of Coney Island.” Coney Island had gradually declined after the 1911 Dreamland fire, which had torched the area’s turn-of-the-century aspirations to be America’s premier amusement resort. Dreamland was never rebuilt, and new amusement parks in warmer locales – **Disneyland** and **Disney World** – usurped Dreamland’s legacy as America’s foremost amusement destination. In 2004, the Coney Island Development Corporation was formed to spearhead “a comprehensive economic development strategy for Coney Island.” Developer **Joe Sitt** unveiled:

“...plans to build a glittering resort paradise right next to the Coney Island boardwalk – a retail and entertainment colossus... The plan includes...an enormous, psychedelic carousel laced with visual cues to a Coney Island that Timothy Leary could have dreamed up. Equally spectacular, Sitt hopes, will be a blimp that will take off from the complex’s roof, carrying tourists on joyrides over the city... Sitt has seen Coney Island’s future, and it looks like Vegas – turned up a few notches.”

– Greg Sargent, “The Incredibly Bold, Audaciously Cheesy, Jaw-Droppingly Vegasified, Billion-Dollar Glam-Rock Makeover of Coney Island,” *New York Magazine*, 2007

Around the same time, an artist-led movement arose to celebrate and preserve “the unique aesthetic of this legendary neighborhood”; **Steve Powers** and **Creative Time**, **The Dreamland Artist Club**, **The Mermaid Parade** and others worked to preserve Coney Island’s indigenous folk arts and architecture, which NYC planning commissioner Stuart Perez called “a combination of honky-tonk and...phantasmagoric dreamland.” In addition, historians created books and websites which documented Coney Island’s history, including **Adam Sandy’s *The Coney Island Pages*** [<http://history.amusement-parks.com/coneybeaches1.html>], **Jeffrey Stanton’s *Coney Island History Site*** [www.westland.net/coneyisland], and **The Coney Island History Project** (founded by **Carol** and **Jerry Albert**, the owners and operators of **Astroland Park** and the Cyclone roller coaster) [www.coneyislandhistory.org].

KEVIN BAKER’S DREAMLAND

Excerpt from **Kevin Baker’s *Dreamland*** Harper Collins: 1999 [<http://www.kevinbaker.info/about.html>]

“I know a story,” said Trick the Dwarf... “It’s a love story,” Trick told [Yolanda]. “It’s a story about love, and jealousy, and betrayal. A story about a young man, the young woman who loved him, and a terrible villain. A story about death, and destruction, and fire. It is a story about thieves and cutthroats, and one man’s vision, and the poor man’s burden, and the rich man’s condescension.

It is a story about Kid Twist, the gangster, and Gyp the Blood, who was a killer...It is a story about Said the whore, and the brave Esther, and the mad Carlotta, and the last summer they all came together in the great park.

It is a story about the Great head Doctors from Vienna, and the rampages of beasts, and the wonders of the Modern Age. It is the story about a great city, and a little city, and a land of dreams. And always, above all, it is a story about fire.”

“Ah”, said Yolanda.... “Ah. The usual.”

OTHER

Poem: **Edgar Allan Poe** “**Dreamland**” 1844 [<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/dreamland>]

Prose: **H. P. Lovecraft** **The Dreamlands** *Wikipedia*

BRIAN CARPENTER'S WORDS ON THE MAKING OF *DREAMLAND*, FROM WWW.MYSPACE.COM/BEATCIRCUS

The Story Behind *Dreamland*

by Brian Carpenter, Tuesday, October 02, 2007

Dreamland is the culmination of a two-year effort marking a radical departure from previous work. It is the first installment of a Weird American Gothic trilogy of song cycles. Perhaps the most striking departure from *Ringleaders* is the shift from an almost completely free improvised environment into narrative songs and relatively through-composed instrumental pieces. Contrary to previous efforts, there is no overall consistent "band sound" on *Dreamland*. Instrumentation and voicings are unique to each song and serve the characters and environment of the song they live in. Rather than dealing with improvisation I wanted to present a fully realized world to the musicians and rely on their stylistic interpretations of the compositions.

About 2/3 of the material on this album is based on a play I wrote (also entitled *Dreamland*) with Faustian themes revolving around the protagonist of Johnny, an alcoholic poverty-stricken gold miner in the Dakota territory who loses his arm in a mining accident. One night Johnny makes a pact with the devil to get his arm back by killing his wife and escapes to New York City to join a traveling sideshow at Coney Island's turn-of-the-century theme park *Dreamland*. Of course any pact with the devil has disastrous consequences... tis a tale of dreams and nightmares, the conscious mind and the subconscious mind, responsibility and consequence.

Dreamland was the most ambitious of the three parks which opened Coney Island at the turn of the 20th century (the other two were Steeplechase and Luna Park). *Dreamland* was the brainchild of a crooked Brooklyn businessman named William H. Reynolds. *Dreamland* seemed to present an entire world of escape to America, the way "it should be", dazzled with thousands of light bulbs and rides representing different battles, natural disasters, and biblical themes (Creation and Hell both represented). Of course, Reynolds' view of America "as it should be" turned out to be an surreal and macabre world of horrors and delights. Sideshows displaying human oddities, a town inhabited by little people where everything is built to their proportion, a roller coaster entitled The Rough Riders which was so dangerous it killed 4 passengers on its opening, a ride called Hells Gate which represented a fiery descent into Hell, and even more horrifying, a museum of human incubators with premature babies kept alive and curated by one doctor who took responsibility for both saving their lives while at the same time exploiting their struggle for survival.

Dreamland opened in 1904 with a performance of the Tin Pan Alley song "Meet Me Tonight In *Dreamland*" and burned in a devastating fire (which started -- ironically enough -- in Hells Gate) in 1911. *Dreamland* has been documented by Richard Snow with a collection of colorized postcards, director Ric Burns in a wonderful documentary film, and author (and Brooklyn resident) Kevin Baker in his book *Dreamland*.

In total *Dreamland* is a 160-page score for twelve musicians. The early stages of development behind *Dreamland* would not have been possible without the core of five musicians I worked with in live performance since the 2004 release of *Ringleaders*, namely tubist Ron Caswell, accordionist Alec K. Redfearn, banjoist Brandon Seabrook, violinist Kaethe Hostetter, and drummer Matt McLaren. Starting in January 2006 I brought three other musicians into the live shows to flesh out my ideas : cellist Julia Kent (Antony & the Johnsons, formerly of Rasputina), trombonist Curtis Hasselbring (Golem), and an old friend of ten years, saxophonist Briggan Krauss (Sex Mob). By this time I had a miniature orchestra at my disposal, a string section, brass section, guitars, accordion, drums, percussion, theremin, and voice. This orchestra gave me the compositional challenges I was looking for to present the stories behind *Dreamland* as I was hearing them.

I had known about Martin Bisi and his work for a long time; his name appears on a good percentage of my favorite records, Sonic Youth's *Bad Moon Rising*, John Zorn's *The Big Gundown*, Naked City, Foetus' *Male*. Amanda Palmer and Brian Viglione of the Dresden Dolls had worked with him in 2001 on their debut album and recommended him highly, as did Dan Kaufman of the post-cabaret band Barbez. I invited Martin out to a show in NYC at Mo Pitkins and a few months later we were recording at the legendary B.C. Studios in Brooklyn. Working with Martin was one of the most rewarding artistic experiences of my life. Martin has huge ears and big ideas but is able to focus even the biggest ideas into quantifiable objectives. He was really a meticulous sculptor who took my big, seemingly impossible ideas and moved them forward to an outcome which more often than not surpassed what I had originally envisioned.

By the summer of 2006 we had enough material to record a full-length. We ended up with enough material to release both a full-length of lyrical songs and through-composed instrumental music which resulted in *Dreamland*, and an EP of modern classical music, noise, and experimental music which resulted in *Blood Boy*. Hope you enjoyed reading this. Perhaps it will give you some insight and perspective on the music. Thank you for supporting strange and beautiful music, stay tuned to this frequency!!!-- B.C

Brian Dewan's *Dreamland* Illustration 9.28.07

In August 2006 I met **Brian Dewan** in NYC at Tonic after he opened for Beat Circus with a very peculiar and moving solo performance of songs accompanied by a giant custom-built electric zither. Built by Brian and made entirely of wood and harpsichord hardware, it is plucked, sits like a table, has eight Humbucker pickups, and sounds like "Jimi Hendrix on smart drugs" (that's a quote from Bar None Records). After hearing these incredible sounds I convinced Brian to come into Martin's studio the next day to record three tracks of electric zither on *Dreamland*. It was not until weeks after the session, going through my cds, that I discovered Brian was also the illustrator responsible for the famous flying victrola for Neutral Milk Hotel's *In The Aeroplane Over The Sea*. I asked him to illustrate the cover for *Dreamland* and he provided the stunning watercolor you see here.

Brian Dewan is a true multi-media artist. He has produced two albums of songs and performed extensively as a solo artist, as well as collaborating with many ensembles such as Flaming Fire, The Music Tapes, They Might Be Giants, and the Raymond Scott Orchestrette. He also builds furniture and instruments; with his cousin Leon, he has designed and built a series of synthesizers in custom cabinetry they refer to as Dewanatron.

Dave Bias (also the designer of this website) designed the booklet for *Dreamland* and it is a beautiful package of song lyrics and historical photographs. After researching hundreds of historical photographs and postcards with Aaron Beebe, curator of the Coney Island Museum, we found several photographs and postcards we are excited to present in the context of *Dreamland*. Other historical photographs used in the booklet were supplied by The Denver Public Library Western History Department, The Library Of Congress, and The Museum Of The City Of New York.

Dreamland will see a release date in January 2008 on Cuneiform Records. -- B.C.