

Oh Brother

Back in the late 80's and early 90's my brother Dave and I collaborated on creating music of our own. We each had 4-track cassette recorders. One of us would lay down one of the tracks and we'd exchange the cassettes weekly in a bowling league we were both in. We'd continue exchanging each one until we thought the piece was done. We both really looked forward to getting home and listening to what the other had created or added. It may have been the most enjoyable activity I ever did.

In 2024 we had plans to resurrect this activity using the internet for exchanging rather than cassette tapes. Extremely unfortunately, Dave passed away before we ever had the chance to re-start.

We didn't create anything we thought was "hit-worthy" but both just loved doing it. There are mistakes and things that could be improved. It was actually challenging at times; as opposed to today where you can go in and fix a single note, change sounds individually and pretty much anything else, you got one shot at this and needed to play whatever you were recording from beginning to end. You could try as many times as you wanted but it had to be the entire song. Also, with only four tracks to work with, more often than not, you had to add tracks together (bounce) to create an open track for whatever you wanted to record. Once you bounced the tracks together, there was no going back to re-record that part.

It was interesting (and sometimes really challenging) to try and mix our styles. I was more acoustic, melodic and 'clean' while Dave loved electronic music (which was cutting edge at the time) and 'in your face' guitars with all kinds of effects. Sometimes, we complemented each other and sometimes I think our styles just clashed.

My personal favorites were "Summertime" (#15) followed by "Caribeanna" (#10) with honorable mention to "Safari" (#5). While too long and with some parts I don't really care for, there are parts of "Segue City" (#13) that I like. The rest range from 'acceptable' to 'meh'.

In my opinion there are snippets of some good and interesting stuff but some of it is really boring, too long and with mistakes. But, it's something captured from a moment in time. We named ourselves "Oh Brother" and ultimately created 17 "songs". Here's a summary with whatever I can remember about them:

John (Jack) Kozak - 2025/2026

1-Down the Drain

Our first collaborative creation. I think I started it with the percussion and basic melody. Dave took the melody to a whole new level and it ended up primarily being us on our individual keyboards with a similar but different sound throughout. To me, it was always less of a song and more of something that could be used as background music in a commercial or something.

2-French Cafe

I started this one as well with percussion and the bassline. Dave had a new 'toy'; a digital saxophone, that of course, he learned to play immediately and added the beautiful melody. In the breaks between his sax playing, it's a combination of us on our keyboards. I distinctly remember that he played it for his friends at McDonalds and told me they loved it and it made them visualize a smokey café with some woman singing in Paris. Hence, the title.

3-Lost Keys

So, one or both of us really messed up with this one. We somehow inadvertently erased all of the tracks that contained keyboards and it ended up nothing but a drum machine and me with multiple acoustic guitar tracks. We were on to other songs we were more interested in and decided just to leave it and, of course, Dave came up with the title "Lost Keys"!

4-Clueless

This was the first one we completed where Dave created the initial track which was nothing but the drums, if I remember correctly. I initially added the primary guitar and then we went back and forth with Dave adding layers of keyboards and me adding additional guitar parts. We couldn't figure out how to end it so we kinda just stopped (lol!).

5-Safari

Kind of a weird one but it always made me think of a scene in Africa someplace, hence the title. I did all of the percussion and the "twinkly" and "slide" keyboards and Dave did all the melody and backup keyboards.

6-Robot Conversation

This one is kinda strange but I remember we had a blast making it. I started with the drums and Dave added the bassline. From there we went back and forth countless times just adding little parts and the other of us would "answer" that part if that's understandable. It was almost like a musical conversation going on. Probably not gonna be an any top 100 but it sure was fun to create!

7-Tokyo

I have no clue what the heck we were doing here! I think it's just proof that you can make drug induced 60's music without even being on drugs! If you ever heard the saying "less is more", this song is "more is more" as I think we tried to see how many different effects we could cram into one piece. Either way, it's not one of my personal favorites, but you never know how it's gonna come out until you're done.

8-Shakin' Not Stirred

To this day I have no clue what the true musical timing is of the drums that Dave originally gave me! I swear it would be just like Dave to come up with the weirdest timing possible and giving it to me as a joke. Either that, or it's the work of some creative genius that I couldn't keep up with. Both are equally possible. Anyway, I know I spent many hours trying to come up with something for it, first on keyboard then on guitar. At one point I almost accidentally did a guitar part that seemed to at least match his drums, making it up as I went and that became the basic starting point. From there Dave added some background and bassy keyboards and I filled in a few more guitar parts. This is also not one of my favorites, but damn Dave! Really?!

9-Time to Wake Up

This one should be some kind of lullaby because the first half is so long and monotonous it could put anyone to sleep. But, then, it transitions into a more upbeat section where we both added guitars that had absolutely nothing to do with the first half! We did include our voices in it which was a change, although no lyrics ... just kinda mumbling. In the more upbeat guitar part I absolutely love Dave's guitar work but, unfortunately, something happened with the track and it was at such a low volume level we couldn't get it to be loud enough despite how much we amplified it.

10-Caribbeanna

This is one of my favorites but definitely too long. I did the percussion. When I could get Dave out of his punk rock head, he came up with some of the most awesome melodies and counter-melodies! The musical part of this is mostly Dave with me just adding the embellishments (occasional horns, etc.).

11-Wah Wah What

We hadn't learned our lesson yet and this is another that's just too long an monotowns. The special part of this is Dave's work using with the wah-wah guitar. I've tried it and have never been able to come close to what he did in this song. I took the lessons, practiced all the hours and he just sat down and did it!!!

12-Theme Song for Something

This is Mr. Dave at it again with some weird drum pattern he gave to me. This time around, I think I totally failed and asked him to add some music to it. It ended up being like 90% his work with me adding some stuff here and there. There are a couple of keyboard solos I did and he said it was one of his favorite things I ever created.

13-Seque City

Talk about long! This may be the most 50/50 song we did. There are so many parts I can't remember exactly who did what. It sounds like most of the keyboards are Dave and most of the guitars are me. Dave told me he could listen to the guitar I did at the end all day; I liked it too and it was actually pretty straight-forward but it struck him somehow. I'm not sure which one of us decided to add the chipmunk voice!

14-Surfin' Circus

Yet another one that's way tooooooo llllooonnnngggg. I think this is what comes out if the Beach Boys and 50's music had a baby in a circus tent. I don't think this is the most creative thing we did, but there's no going back now.

15-Summertime

This is definitely my favorite thing I've ever created alone or in collaboration with Dave musically (other than my later work "Infinity"). I always visualize tropical beach with palm trees just swaying in the breeze when I listen to it. And the title "Summertime" just always seemed to fit for me. I had plans that I never got to talk to Dave about of writing some lyrics for it, recreating it and making it a real singing song. I may try on my own but I'm sure it won't be as good as it could have been. As always, it's a bit too long but wouldn't be too hard to correct.

16-Synth Fever

I have no idea or explanation for this. They are definitely my drums and Dave's electronic keyboard but, otherwise, I don't know what this is or what it was supposed to be.

17-Ended Too Soon

This one strikes me as something like a theme that belongs somewhere but I can't seem to nail it down. It's a simple mixture of each of our keyboards with an easy drum pattern. We probably had plans to work on it more but this is when the distance became an issue and it was before the Internet so we had no choice but to end it here. We never got the change to continue, hence, the title.