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Music 32 Years in the Making

In 1990, Keith Mack and Ed Shockley wrote songs for a major label album they were signed to record. In 2022, the public can finally hear them.

BY LYNN R. PARKS | PHOTOGRAPH BY SCOTT NATHAN











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In 1990, professional musicians Keith Mack and Ed Shockley, both coastal Sussex natives, were living in Manhattan near the East Village's Tompkins Square Park.

"We had apartments in the same building," Mack recalls. And close apartments: "My floor was his ceiling."

Mack, a guitarist, had moved to New York in 1982 and was playing with Scandal, a rock band featuring lead singer Patty Smyth. He had also toured with British rock stars Joe Cocker (1989) and Paul Young (1990).

A drummer and singer, Shockley had moved to the city in late 1983 and had signed with Cries, a band on the BMG recording label and of which

Mack was also a member. In a typical week, the two artists could be involved in five different projects, Shockley notes: "One of the singer/songwriters would put a band together and you would rehearse for maybe two weeks. Then you would go out and do a series of showcases" to try to draw attention to the songs.

That pace slowed down a bit in 1990, when Shockley and Mack signed a publishing deal with BMG, which commissioned them to write and record songs for an album.

"They paid us a little bit of money, so we could take time and dedicate it to writing, rather than the hustle," Shockley says. The two men, notebooks and pencils in hand, would walk

Local musicians Keith Mack, left, and Ed Shockley work on a song from their new album, "What Happened," expected to be released this month. The album, recorded in a local studio, brings to life songs that the duo wrote decades ago, but that were never released.


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down to Tompkins Square every day, where they would compose music and write lyrics.

"We probably wrote 25 to 30-some songs," Mack says. "That time was perfect, living in the same building on Avenue A and having the luxury to write nearly every day."

He and Shockley formed a band, first called 1A2B (their apartment numbers), then Moving Day, and recorded demos of the songs in the studio Mack had set up in his apartment's bedroom. But in the end, due to "record company politics," he says, the project was scratched. Other than the demos created in that small bedroom studio, there were no recordings of the music they'd created.

Until now.

Working in a local studio during the COVID-19 pandemic, the duo recorded nine of the songs they wrote in Tompkins Square. The compilation, dubbed "What Happened," is set for release this month on electronic platforms and as a CD. The newly formed band Shockley Mack is also performing the tunes locally this summer.

In the recording, the men take turns on lead vocals, except for first track, "Fight the Fight," which features both in a duet. (The song, which tells the story of one of their neighbors on Avenue A, is not about the songwriting or recording process. "We don't really fight," Shockley says, though he acknowledges that "we have opinions." "But we get through it," Mack adds.)

On "Stay" — "As long as you're going my way,/ Why don't you stay with me a while longer?/ Stay until hell freezes over"

— Shockley's distinctive gravelly voice is joined by that of Nashville singer/songwriter Kim Parent, the only artist to appear on the album other than the two men.

And another song, "Same Sun," is perfect for homesick coastal Sussex Countians, wherever they are. "Sometimes I trip back to the place where I come from," Mack sings. "Warm breezes and soft sand — it's so good to be back home."

Both musicians enjoyed recording the 30-year-old songs. "It was fun looking back at that time in our lives, and we tried to do them in the spirit of where we were at the time," Mack says. "We didn't try to reinvent them in the spirit of what we're doing now."

Shockley was particularly pleased to play drums on the songs; in the demos, the rhythm track was provided by a drum machine he had programmed. ("Obviously, we couldn't record drums in a New York apartment," Mack explains.)

"It was fun to discover the songs that way," Shockley says. And he's happy to have the songs he co-wrote finally recorded in a professional way. "I really feel compelled to record the music that I write, just so that it's preserved. Now, we have these nice versions of our songs. We get to play them, and people get to listen to them."

Mack, who grew up in Rehoboth Beach, was in his first band by age 12. As a teen, he was a member of the popular local group Eighth Day. Following the advice of his parents, he went to the University of Delaware where he earned a degree in accounting. "But as soon as I graduated, I went to New York City to try to pursue music."

Looking the Part

Musician Ed Shockley says that since he can remember, he's wanted to be part of a rock band. As a child, he studied the pop stars of the day, not just for tips about best ways to sing, but to understand their mannerisms.

"I would watch Ricky Nelson sing," he says. "And I would be like, he consciously doesn't blink, and when he does, he does it really slow."

But as he saw things, his looks were a drawback to a career on the stage. "I had really red hair and freckles, and all the singers in the 1960s were dark-complected guys with dark hair," he remembers. "And I thought, 'Well, I'm not going to be able to do that.' Then when the Beatles came out, they weren't really handsome — well, Paul was cute — and I thought, 'Well, there might be a chance for me.'" ■

“.....

It was fun looking back at that time in our lives; we tried to do the songs in the spirit of where we were at the time.”

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He moved back to coastal Sussex in 2000 and gave up his apartment in the Big Apple in 2005. He wanted to be near his family as well as his girlfriend, Jeanie Woods, who is now his wife. In addition, "I have a lot of friends here and I've always loved this area," he says.

Shockley, who grew up in and still lives in Lewes, also was in a local group while in high school, the well-known Jack of Diamonds. After graduating from the University of Delaware, he worked as a special education teacher as well as a salesman of women's sportswear. "But music has always had a way — every time I thought I would do something else — of pulling me back in," he says. "Music is just in me. It's a joy in every single way."

Shockley and his wife, Jill, left New York City and bought a house in Wilmington in 2000, "mainly for our son to be closer to his grandparents and to have a better quality of life," he says.

A couple years later, they moved back to Lewes. "My wife has always said, 'Ed may have left Lewes, but Lewes never left Ed.' And it is true that a part of Lewes is welded to my soul." ■

Lynn R. Parks is a frequent contributor to Delaware Beach Life.

 **TO HEAR THE SONGS** "What Happened," featuring new recordings of old songs by Keith Mack and Ed Shockley, is expected to be available this month on streaming services including Spotify and iTunes. Samples of the music are also available at keithmack.net. Also on that website, as well as on vinylshockley.com, is information about local live performances of the songs.



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