

## Notes On Moth Nor Rust 2009



### **Production**

*Moth Nor Rust* was produced by Pat Simmonds and was recorded in January, 2009, at *Crystal Clear Sound* by Jason LaPrade. It was engineered, mixed and mastered by Jason, myself, and Pat.

An earlier version of *Moth Nor Rust* was recorded by Charlie Gray and Pat Simmonds on December 3, 2008, in the Beaches area of Toronto. *There Is Only Love* was taken from this earlier session.

## Track Listing

1. War Resister
2. When We Go
3. The Crying of The Times
4. God Pt. IV
5. Small
6. If We Keep What's Within Us, What's Within Us Will Kill Us  
But If We Give What's Within Us, What's Within Us Will Save Us
7. In The Alleys
8. Safer Days
9. The Crying of The Times (Reprise)
10. There Is Only Love

## Theme and 'Trilogy'

This 'trilogy' thing sounds pretentious, I know – be reminded I didn't say 'trptych'. But doing things in threes helps me focus on what I feel are worthy and helpful issues to write about. I worry about waking up one day and realizing the last 10 songs I wrote were all selfish little dear diary ramblings that the world neither needs nor cares to hear. Song writing is nothing if it is not public and themes keep me at least partially convinced that I am doing something useful for the public.

So: *Moth Nor Rust* will conclude a thematically linked trilogy of cds. *No Mean City* (2006) was an exposition of the modern urban soul's essential homelessness and moral fatigue. And, since inevitably, such spiritual malaise leads ultimately to war, *Ours And The Shepherds* (2007) was a collection of Canadian war stories from WWI through to the current missions in Afghanistan. *Moth Nor Rust* (2009) is an effort to end the trilogy on a hopeful note: on the possibility of spiritual renewal. *Moth Nor Rust* focuses on the inner necessities of human survival: forgiveness, repentance, trust, justice, love – essentially: all that neither *moth nor rust* can touch. The title is taken from Matthew 6:19 – 21:

*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

## Theme and Presentation

Theme is not reserved to lyrics. Theme should also inform a recording's musical decisions. Whereas, *No Mean City* describes relentless worldliness and *Ours And The Shepherds* outlines the result of such spiritual vacancy, *Moth Nor Rust* aims to chronicle all that transcends worldliness, all that moves above distraction and workaday affairs: love, hope, trust, memory, faith – in a word: peace. For this reason, *Moth Nor Rust* needed to be presented in an austere solo format. The songs needed to express the *greatest* amount of thought and emotion by the *least* amount of time and space.

## Style

Stylistically, the songs differ from *No Mean City* and *Ours And The Shepherds*, too. Of the 10 songs, only 3 are first person narratives – my favourite, by the way. Another departure from the first two discs: these songs are urgently assertive. These are morally instructive songs. These are songs of action; they assure us that action - though dangerous and never a promise of fruitful end - is still *the only option*. In our passive world, *Moth Nor Rust* may languish on the outskirts of approval; it may be casually dismissed; then again, it may be the recording that momentarily stuns someone out of fear and into love. I'll hope for the latter, but it's now too late for me to say. A former composition professor said to me once: "sometimes you just have to finish it and see what they say next year."

## The Songs

### War Resister

*War Resister* chronicles the life of US Iraq War resister, Jeremy Hinzman. As well, it alludes to my own 'walk away' from the war themed *Ours And The Shepherds*. After a number of interviews Jeremy and I became friends. Opinions on this story are absolute on both sides. Many doubt the gifts brought to Canada by thousands of war resisters from the Vietnam era to the present. This song aims to tell Jeremy's story that you may experience the 'resister' as a person and not simply as a statistic. It would be neat and tidy if a single individual could be representative of all war resisters; this, however is not the case. In my research, each have their own story, each with varying degrees of legitimacy and ingenuousness – it's tempting, but I fear we do our country and ourselves a disservice in judging these individuals *en masse*.

Those who doubt Jeremy's intentions need to know, him and his wife, Nga, are currently trying to figure out a way to invite homeless people in Parkdale, Toronto, into their home. They live in a boarding house apartment with 2 young children.

### When We Go

This was written originally for my sister. She asked me to write and perform a song for her wedding in 2007. The second time I performed it was at Norm Hacking's wake at The Renaissance Café. It stands as my best proof that all great funeral dirges are also testaments to the immortality of love.

## The Crying Of The Times

This song began in a hotel room conversation with my friend and touring partner, Bill Heffernan, in Kenora, Ontario on my way out to the 2008 Edmonton Folk Festival - I finished it in a hotel room in Canada's walleye fishing capital, Wabigoon, Ontario on the way back. The music was originally written for an alternative live version of 2007's *Hill 677*. It's currently my favourite song to play live and its upbeat tempo will probably keep it high in the 2009 setlist order.

## God Pt. IV

Mary Jo Leddy invited me to perform a song at the *2008 June Callwood Lecture* featuring a talk given by James Lockyer, lawyer for the wrongfully convicted. I wrote a song, entitled, *God Pt. III*.

In 1970, John Lennon recorded the song, *God*. *God* was a list of what the post-*Beatles* Lennon no longer believed in: organized religion, exterior means of salvation, politics, *The Beatles*, and so on. The song is charmingly earnest and I do respect the songwriter who dares to write earnestly – especially these days, when 'earnest' is used pejoratively. However, *God* ends on a sentiment I've never accepted: *I just believe in me, Yoko and me*. My initial distaste for the line was that I thought it perpetuated a hopelessly selfish worldview antithetical to everything else Lennon stood for. I suspected any songwriter as active in the peace movement as Lennon was, would one day come to cringe at such naked self-centredness. I later came to regard my reaction as an unfair interpretation, as it becomes clear in the song's later moments that Lennon is not really debunking anything greater than his own mythic *Beatles* persona.

In 1988, U2 aligned themselves with popular music tradition when they wrote and recorded, *God Pt. II* as homage to Lennon. Bono's sequel is also an earnest list of negatives; however, it takes a decidedly more mature and universal aim. The song's form is firmly structured and Bono repeats the positive belief at the end of each verse: *I believe in love*. Bono even manages to balance earnestness with humour and self-effacement, however - and for all its success - *God Pt. II*, is still not completely free of pop self-awareness.

The late Larry Norman also wrote a few versions of *God* inspired by Lennon. His takes deserve acknowledgement because of his candour, wit, and his courage to state his case in overtly Christian terms.

I wanted to hear a 'folk' sequel of *God* that was devoid of *me* and *I*. Maybe the essential difference between 'pop' and 'folk' genres is pop music's use of *I* and *me* as opposed to the folk song that sings of *us* and *we*. *God Pt. III* was first inspired by Martin Buber's *I And Thou* writings and the counter intuitive idea

that it is only through our ability to see others that we may see and therefore become ourselves. Thus the verse: *I don't believe we disagree, I don't believe we're two/I don't believe we have a choice/Stranger, I believe in you.* It's no longer original to admit we live in a *post Christian era*, as Thomas Merton recklessly declared. 'Anti-religious times,' or, 'an age of spiritual decline' may arrest more accurately the contempt we have for all manner of religious thought today. And yet, how arrogant, how irrational the secular solution: to casually abandon 2000+ years of culture, thought, and tradition over the fact that we are presently incapable of reconciling our current age with the gifts of the past. *God Pt. III* is an attempt to inspire further discussion on what God means to us today. I maintain a dim hope that we might recognize ourselves in others better if we continue to wrestle with this common human question of God. If the sight of God is anything, it is the sight of compassion, peace and justice – or more simply, the sight of others before ourselves.

'Social justice' is no longer a meaningful term. Its edges have worn soft by over use. What are we talking about when we say we want greater 'social justice?' I am guilty of blathering this myself. After all, is not that which is 'social' also that which is 'just?' And vice versa: is not that which is 'anti-social' also that which is unjust? As Mary Jo Leddy put it: 'are we not simply talking about justice - period?' Justice: the equality of suffering. By compartmentalizing the various forms of justice into separate issues of ecology, gender, race, socio – I can't even bring myself to completing that jargon – do we not weaken the force of our first purpose? Our first purpose: that of furthering justice, of evening out human suffering? Are not all the aims of justice related, too?

It's well past the time for debate concerning humanity's interconnectedness and our interdependence of each other within one human organism. I don't need to argue the point; we are irreversibly one and when one part of us is hurt, we all hurt. We must admit, there will always be suffering – as well, it's time to admit that not all suffering is strictly degenerative. But wherever abject and degrading suffering occurs we are all together damaged by it in some way. If justice is, in fact, the effort to maintain a balance of moderate suffering, then the idea of diminishing justice into sub-categories seems unhelpful. As I write this, 80% of the world's population exists in desperate poverty while the remaining 20% of us live in a stupor of opulence. And if over abundance wasn't itself a moral failing; add to that our smug feelings of entitlement to our contemporary excesses.

When Mary Jo Leddy invited me to write a song for the *2008 June Callwood Lectures*, I found the opportunity to unite the idea of God with the idea of justice. It is fear, not oceans, that is the true divide between East and West. And amid such fear, questions of 'God' and 'justice' will not go away. And so it goes, we have no choice: artist, poet, writer, activist, lawyer, politician, and voter alike will all have to reckon with such questions sooner than later. I do believe we stand some small chance at lifting humanity to a more mature age when we begin to answer such questions by looking not first at ourselves but into the eyes of others. *So may we believe, may we believe/may we believe – if just one thing/in what a lot a little more justice could bring.*

## Small

This is one of 2 songs on my setlists that survived the '90s (you can guess the other one – it may end up on my next release, tentatively called, *Bless You, Prison*). I wrote *Small* in Newmarket in January 1994. I wrote it during a pathetic and - thankfully - a younger time. By day I was a dishwasher in *Upper Canada Mall*; by night I was living in the basement of my former bands' drummer's mom's house. My drummer's mom was as kind as pure charity and her husband was a trucker who was seldom home. Their marriage was in its last cruel chapter and she made her private quarters in the living room. I felt guilty about staying amid a family clearly unfit for its members, never mind its outsiders. I felt bad for her embarrassment and for her failed marriage so exposed and I felt worse for the younger brother in the middle of it; hence, the line: *we got a son in the middle and he just turned 4/he's the only reason that we're not divorced/one night he asked why a couch was a bed...*

Looking back, I see an innocence in both the father *and* the son in *Small*. This is my innocence, as comparatively, I was raised in opulence: in one house and by two relatively well-married and selfless adults. In January 1994 I was 25 years old: the moment my Gen X eyes began to open to this world.

### **If We Keep What's Within Us, What's Within Us Will Kill Us But If We Give What's Within Us, What's Within Us Will Save Us**

This song stands between cruel-eyed journalism and impassioned ranting. Right up there with sentimentality, this is the ice-road truck driving risk for songwriters because ranting and polemic generally do not yield positive inspiration. That said, ours are times that beg for more impassioned assertion, more urgent and inspired address and less claptrap and theatre – simply put, we need to act *more* out of love and *less* out of politics. How can the human community feed its young and sustain itself – never mind, thrive – if the majority of us are so obviously and systemically alienated from what we do during the few hours the sun is in the sky? Whatever the outcome, this song falls in the tradition of spoken word and is based on *The Gospel Of Thomas, 70*:

If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.

*If We Keep...* needed to be 20 verses; it needed to be repetitive, it needed to be unrelenting, it needed to be bold, live, solo; it needed its teeth jagged – and, in these dark days, I believe this message needed to be pure of ornament, irony, and production.

## In The Alleys

Written in 2007 and inspired by my dog, *Hud*. He's a Golden Retriever and he's 110 pounds of pure love. That's all he does: love. I used to take him for walks down the alleys behind Roncesvalles Avenue and Pearson in Toronto's Polish town. *Hud* can only give. He gives in a way that suggests that, in the eyes of animals, there are no strangers. Perhaps this is why animals were the only ones *not* banished from the garden in the *Genesis* story.

## Safer Days

In short, this song is a thank-you note to Alberta for the kindness she's shown me.

At length, there is a bar in Calgary I had the fortunate misfortune to stay at during my 2008 tour called, *The Cecil*. Truth be told, there's a *Cecil* in Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Vancouver, and Edmonton, too – all laughably unaffiliated. These are not good places. And that's okay; in every city, there are many truths that will be generously shared only by its most deprived areas.

## The Crying Of The Times (Reprise)

Maybe, my producer, Pat Simmonds', favourite song in this group. He loves that dour A minor form. It's sometimes my favourite, too. The fourth verse alludes to Pete Seeger's show at Hugh's Room in Toronto in July 2008. If I had to cite but one influence behind *Moth Nor Rust* it would be Mr. Seeger. For a while I considered naming this collection after one of his early releases: *Hard Hitting Songs For Hard Hit People*. I'll borrow that one later.

## There Is Only Love

*There Is Only Love* is as difficult to play, as it is thematically simple. Far and away the hardest song I've ever recorded. The leap in the harp melody is a vague hope every time. We recorded an alternate version of this song on banjo but opted to keep the 10 songs decisive and without distraction. The lyrics are based on the four elements: earth, wind, fire, and water. The point is equally simple: all *living* things are reducible to one thing: love.

