

Program Notes

These brief notes do not attempt to substitute for the lyrics to the songs. But poetry is very difficult to translate. For those not fluent in English I want to give a glimpse of the theme of each song and my motives for writing them. Hopefully, this will make it possible to better share the feelings and ideas expressed by the words and music together.

Outbound Train

Sometimes you can't help but wonder, "Is it me or is it the world that's crazy?" Nothing makes any sense. And there are so many lies. If there's one thing you'd gamble on it's the chance that going anywhere would be better than this nowhere. This song is about taking that chance.

Jonny Refused

Opposition to the Viet Nam War took many forms. One form was refusing to be drafted into the US Army. Hundreds of thousands of young men refused. Some went to prison, others went to Canada. Some were lucky to be born a few years later. By the time they were called the US Army was having so much trouble with mutinous troops they stopped taking those who offered conscious political resistance. I was one of those. A decade after the US was defeated they built a monument in Washington to the thousands of US soldiers killed in Viet Nam. I wrote this song as a monument to those of us who refused to go in the first place.

The Hunted

From Nazi Germany to Pinochet's Chile, many are the examples of people being 'disappeared'. Sadly, this State terror continues in many parts of the world. I wanted to capture the feelings of two people on the run, with no hope for escape. What keeps them going?

Old John Brown

When the Union Army marched out to fight in the US Civil War, their song of battle was "John Brown's Body". This song commemorated the heroism of Brown and the fight against slavery. Yet, two years before, in 1859, John Brown was hanged by the same government for leading an uprising against that very same slavery. Today he would be called a terrorist. I wanted to remind people, particularly Americans, that slavery, Civil War and men like Brown continue to haunt this divided land. The wounds have never healed.

Learn

Immediately after the events of 9/11 2001 I wrote this song. Like most people I was shocked by the crime. But in short order I realized how little difference this would make even as certain "leaders" claimed the world was forever changed. Resort to violence, particularly of the massive, military kind known as war, is not new. Unfortunately, the same "leaders" who followed the crime of 9/11 with more of their own, are utterly lacking in imagination. Indeed, what could be older, more redundant than war?

Why Can't We Tell The Truth?

How often we speak with someone close to us and don't say what we really think or feel. How often there is a polite exchange: "How are you?" "I'm fine." How often it would be so much better to speak openly and deeply about what is troubling us. How often we avoid this opportunity to fulfill the responsibility we have to each other.

The Geronimo Paradox

Geronimo is an historical figure known to every American. Like John Brown, Geronimo is a name forever connected to resistance to injustice. Yet, officially, both men were branded terrorists by the US government. The paradox presented by Geronimo is simply this: why do people resist, even when no hope of winning is on the horizon? Perhaps they see beyond the horizon.

River Without End

During the 90s my hometown of San Francisco was overtaken by the “dot-com bubble”. This mania began wiping away what remained of the Sixties: all the joy and inspiration of that world changing moment in time. Those of us who’d lived and made that moment were, naturally, dismayed by this turn of events. Many were downcast by the dismal silliness and triviality of the virtual reality that poisoned the atmosphere. Actual reality, however, is different. And infinitely better.

Harmony

Imagining a world of health and happiness is as ancient as imagining itself. Harmony, to the Greeks of old meant union of body and soul. Murrain means disease, generally, but it is used specifically to name a pestilence that infects animals. In the Middle Ages fires were built through which the animals were driven to purge them of it. These were called “need-fires”. Beltane is a Celtic celebration of renewal and rebirth customarily taking place May 1. Other references in this song are made to convey my feelings about being human and what we might make possible.

Recognize Yourself

I was born and lived most of my life in San Francisco, a port city of immigrants and wanderers, temporary residents and permanent adventurers. Where no group constitutes a majority, all are minorities. Being a native here meant being among the smallest minority of all since everyone was from somewhere else. I walked and worked these streets all my life. I learned that my survival depended on seeing beneath the outward differences of appearance to the human being underneath.

What It’s All About

Once it was shocking that there were so many homeless people in one of the richest, most beautiful cities in the world, San Francisco. Now it’s virtually ignored. It’s the banal, casual tragedy of urban life, like potholes or graffiti. But I was never unaffected by the predicament. What I saw, staring me in the face, was the gaping hole in the social fabric when even one soul must beg for bread.

Circle ‘Round

The UN was founded in San Francisco in 1948. To commemorate this event a plaza was constructed and in this plaza stands a statue of Simon Bolivar, the great liberator of Latin America. Beneath this statue, a woman sat day in and day out, speaking to the birds. Quite mad, I assume. I saw her regularly while I was driving taxi. I invented a story that might have been hers.

Proving Ground

Having just played a gig in Las Vegas, our tour bus took us north through a part of Nevada known as the Proving Ground. It was where the military experimented with weapons of mass destruction including the atomic bombs dropped on Japan. This silent vastness held all the drama of human ingenuity and human folly; of titanic forces at our command swallowed up by the landscape in which they are exploded. The question hangs suspended before us: what choices will we make?

Paradise (is right here)

This song needs no explanation. But it was written for Yvonne and it is an expression of our shared philosophy.