

Ok, I have decided to give this blog thing a try, it may or may not be of interest to some, let's see how it goes. It's not an opinion piece or a journalism column I want to create here, but a place to lay out some thoughts and experiences gathered over the last 17 years of being in the music selling business. And specifically the Vinyl selling business. Yes, it's been that long, seems improbable now but there it is. Mistakes were made, things I thought were good ideas turned out not to be. Such is the way of trying to do what you love as a business.

I think I will use this space somewhat selfishly to relate some of the music that made itself important to me over the years, and share some discovered artists, genre dodging and genre busting, the unexpected from the expected, and those who should have run out of ideas decades ago but just didn't. Where then to start. As this could be considered (and intended) introductory, I feel something that recently made an impression is as good a place as any.

So to one of my enduring go to musical oeuvres, and please don't hate on my use of the term, I didn't invent the amorphous clumping together of wide ranging styles we now call Alt-country. I know right? Stupid name, also it is abused as "Americana", I'm not sure which is worse. Since arguably the late 70's, but more usually the late 80's, this term has encompassed everything from the Long Riders, The Mekons, Uncle Tupelo, through Wilco and Son Volt that this band spawned, to Ryan Adams, Lucinda Williams, Old 97's, Alejandro Escovedo and many, many more.

Add to this general list of nameables a guy who fits rather uncomfortably amongst them, and probably the most obscure. Joe Henry, who's claim to fame is being Madonna's brother in law and writing a few album tracks for her. Songwriter, singer, musician, producer of more famous people's records, he has a fine discography of his own. If I were to approach his records I may start with his latest, and maybe his best thus far " The gospel according to water ". I'm not sure this is Alt-country as the critics would pigeonhole, but it is undoubtedly roots music from the American tradition, beautifully written, played and in this album's case, recorded. So there it is, a recommendation of sorts I guess, if you like honest craft honestly performed and don't mind sparse acoustic guitar, vocal and the occasional piano you never know, this may just be for you.





By way of some back story, this album was made during a prolonged period of crippling pain, caused by a late MRI diagnosis of prostate cancer. He must have been carrying the disease for a while, his doctors had previously diagnosed prostatitis. Finally, on an MRI done at his wife's insistence, due to his unrelenting back pain, it turned out to be Stage 4 prostate cancer. And it had spread to his spine. He was given 3 months to live. Fortunately, Joe was referred to a UCLA oncologist who put him on a cocktail treatment, and he is now in remission. He is a lucky man, the same disease killed Frank Zappa in his 50's, Joe was 58. As a result, the record has a distinct melancholia about it, as well as acceptance and gratitude without regret. Often Compared with Tom Waits and John Hiatt, Joe Henry is neither. He has his own furrow ploughed through many decades of playing, producing and recording himself and other artists. This double 180g gatefold LP is the best way of listening to this music, through all 4 sides of it as it unfolds.

The tone on many of these songs is understated, intimate, and take a few plays to fully reveal their lyrical and musical magic. All the very best albums I find reward repeated listening's, those that shine on first play sometimes whither under more exposure, not this record.

I have put a link to one of the albums best songs below, click to enjoy!

<https://youtu.be/b6u2FGBiRRY>

Cheers for now, Mark

