

Joel Rafael – Bio

Joel Rafael was born in Chicago, Illinois during 1949. When he was three, Joel's family relocated to Southern California. I asked Joel about his earliest musical memory, "*When I was five, I was given a toy saxophone. Then I began digging through my parent's records. My mom worked with my dad, and they weren't home a lot. My parents loved big band music. As a child I loved to sing when I was alone.*" Aged seven Joel took accordion lessons, and later became a drummer in the School Band. During his Junior High School years, folk music became extremely popular. Joel wanted a guitar, so he purchased one in Mexico and learned his first chords from school friends. Later, he was able to buy a Goya guitar. By his seventeenth year Joel was performing at open mics. in LA County clubs. "*The Troubadour on a Monday. The Ice House on a Sunday.*" Joel performed cover songs, having only penned a few originals at this stage. Following High School graduation, Joel moved to Oregon with some friends. Their aim was to buy land and establish an egalitarian community. With few places to play locally, for a number of years, Joel put his guitar to one side.

After the Oregon project failed, Joel recalled, "*A friend taught me to make leather goods. Later, my girlfriend, Lauren - now my wife - and I, and this friend, Dennis, had a leather shop in Seattle. It didn't work out, and Lauren and I headed into the Cascade Mountains. In Granite Falls we found a cabin where we spent two years.*" In 1971 when the couple returned to California, Lauren was pregnant. As Joel recalled, "*My mother owned property in San Diego County. She needed somebody to take care of it. We moved on to the property. That's where I've been for the last thirty years. As soon as I got there, I started writing songs.*"

During his absence the club scene had altered. "*The Troubadour still had the Monday night thing, but it had matured. Then I ran into Rosie Flores and we performed as a duo for a year and a half. Eventually, she moved to Los Angeles.*" Through the eighties, Joel opened for national touring acts who passed through Southern California. "*My first date was at the La Paloma Theatre in Encinitas for the Rick Danko Band. By the mid-eighties I built a home recording studio.*" Intending to record his own album, Rafael ended up offering his services to local musicians.

One of his clients, Jim Hinton, told Joel to "make an album." Jim Hinton, his wife Theresa Rochelle and Joel formed Reluctant Angel and cut an album. Joel passed a tape to an old acquaintance, Paul Rothchild, who in turn gave it to Jac Holzman. Initially offered a contract, the deal with Discovery Records eventually fell through. The trio split up and soon afterwards Joel called an old school buddy. "*Carl Johnson had begun playing again. Carl was my inspiration, because I was down about the record deal. I was in my forties. I'd had a long, somewhat uneventful career, but I'd been in it for the right reasons – I loved playing music. Carl and I began playing as a duo and ran into Jeff Berkley. We became the Joel Rafael Band. My daughter Jamaica, who was in Flagstaff going to school, started singing with us. Eventually she added the violin. In 1994 we recorded our first album.*"

"**The Joel Rafael Band**" is a stunning collection, and includes the anthemic "America Come Home." "**Old Wood Barn**" which appeared a couple of years later opened with the gentle "Ballad Of Bellingham." "Coal Mining Town" recalled Joel's family roots in Illinois, while "Time Stands Still" focused on the numerous paths of life.

Four years elapsed before Joel released another album, a period during which he made and scrapped a live album and was involved in an automobile accident that incapacitated him for twelve months. Production of the band's third studio album, "**Hopper**" is credited to Joel, with Paul Dieter and Dan Rothchild. "*I met Paul through my management, which is also Jackson Browne's management. I had talked with Dan Rothchild [Paul's son] about playing bass, and assumed he would overdub. It turned out he was free, so he became an important part of the production process.*" Where the earlier discs had been independent self-releases [on Reluctant Angel], "**Hopper**" was released by Browne's label, Inside Recordings. It featured the Guthrie/Bragg collaboration "Way Over Yonder In The Minor Key," and "China Basin Digs" co-written with John Trudell.

To date, Joel has played all the Woody Guthrie Free Festival's in Okemah, Oklahoma and at the 2002 event "**Woodeye**" was released. The album includes "Dance A Little Longer" and teams a Guthrie lyric with Joel's music, while on the traditional "Sowing On The Mountain" Joel adapted Woody's melody. Rafael penned "Talking Oklahoma Hills" is a tribute Joel penned to Okemah, and Guthrie originals fill the

remainder of the disc. Regarding the album, Joel says “*It's more like a celebration and acknowledgement of how timeless Woody's material is, and how well it lives on into the new millennium.*” On the April 2005 Appleseed release “**Woodboy**” Rafael continues his exploration of the music of Guthrie, and the twelve-song collection includes half a dozen Woody originals, one new Joel Rafael song, a reading of the Billy Bragg/Guthrie co-write “Way Over Yonder In The Minor Key” [which also appeared on “**Hopper**”] and a quartet of tunes bearing the composer credit Guthrie/Rafael.

Helmed by Jimmy LaFave and his friend, the late Bob Childers, in recent years Rafael has taken part in the Woody Guthrie tribute show **Ribbon of Highway, Endless Skyway**. Joel's sixth solo recording “**13 Stories High**” was released by Jackson Browne's label Inside Recordings during the late spring of 2008. Produced by Rafael and mostly recorded at Cedar Creek Studios in Austin, Texas contributors to the recording included Jamaica, plus David Crosby, Graham Nash and members of LaFave's current band – Wally Doggett [drums], John Inmon [guitar] and Radoslov Lorkovic [keyboards, accordion]. Featuring thirteen songs, eleven penned by Rafael, including one with Mark McCelmore, there were also covers written by Steve Earle and Jack Hardy.

Discography : “**Joel Rafael Band**” [1994] ; “**Old Wood Barn**” [1996] ; “**Hopper**” [2000] ; “**Woodeye**” [2002] ; “**Woodboy**” [2005] ; “**13 Stories High**” [2008] :

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