

Carrie Newcomer “The Gathering Of Spirits” Interview

Carrie Cares, With A Passion - Part 2 - The Songs

Last week Carrie talked about making her latest album in her hometown of Bloomington, Indiana. This week we focus on the songs she wrote for “The Gathering Of Spirits.”

While clearly acknowledging the album title, the songs possess a powerful spiritual content.

Absolutely. This is the album I've been trying to make my whole career. It's the strongest lyric writing and the strongest music I've ever released. It's a more intimate album. There is a spirituality that runs through all my work – maybe this album is a little more overt, a little more up front with it. It's spiritual, but not necessarily religious. I like to make that distinction. I don't censor my writing. I write about being a human in my romantic relationships, my family relationships, my spiritual relationships, even my political relationships sometimes. In terms of the language on this album, the ideas, I feel this is powerful language. They are powerful concepts. They don't get to be claimed by one group, they belong to all of us. I get to say the word “*spirit*” or “*soul*” or “*holy*” – that doesn't belong to just one group. I guess that is the ornery-ness in me [Laughs]. Last year, I backed off touring and did a lot of writing.

Were most of the songs for “The Gathering Of Spirits” written last year, while you were, inverted commas, resting.

[Carrie laughs out loud].

I knew the album title track from your Y2K video release, so that song was written a couple of years ago.

Right. Everything else was written last year. Because I was off the road I could focus. I write on the road. I write all the time, but I don't write melodies so much on the road. I always have my journals and I write essays, and poetry and prose.

The opening song “Holy As A Day Is Spent” seems to say every aspect of life is holy. I don't think you mean holy in the traditional sense [Pause]. I'm fumbling here.....

In the liner notes I quote my friend's comment that “*Carrie, you know, the sacred is when two and two make five.*” I loved the concept. The idea that life is more than what we see in the palm of our hand. You know it's just a sunset, but it's really *five*. It's just a kid in your arms, but there's something very *five* about that. A lot of us know what *five* is, we've felt *five*, but it's very hard to explain. Sometimes that something *more* that happens to us happens in the smallest of things. A lot of this album talks about the *small moment* – we have the big stuff, the birthdays and the anniversaries and stuff, but most of our lives are really lived in the *small moment*.

What you describe in the lyric are just the mundane and ordinary daily events of life.

Yes. That's kind of how I see it. Life is so busy, we are all so busy, that I hate when I get to the end of a day and go “*Darn, I missed it.*” I was too busy to notice, and a lot of that song is about noticing.

Is there also an aspect of living every day to its fullest extent.

I don't know about England, but here in the States there is a culture of celebrity. It's like, to be valid, you have to have had fifteen minutes on some programme on television or something. To me, I feel like there is such nobility in simply, a life well lived. To be a good writer, or to be the person you can always depend on. The good friend, who is a good listener, or a good father. In the culture of celebrity, that gets lost. It's not big enough or fancy enough to be the friend that listens well. That's what a lot of this album is about – it is saying, “*It is good enough. In fact it's a lot.*”

“I'll Go Too” also focuses on some simple everyday events.

Sometimes there are things that you have to do alone. There is just no getting around it. But there are times when someone says, “*I'll go with you. I'll walk with you on this one.*” Sometimes you return the favour on that. What an amazing thing that is, that we experience that in our lives, and it's such a small thing, and such an

amazingly important thing. That's really what that whole song is about, just having someone say, "OK, I'll walk this one with you."

Following on from your 1996 composition "My Father's Only Son" [ED. NOTE. Carrie's parents had no sons. The song particularly refers to her many fishing expeditions with her dad as she grew up], isn't "I'll Go Too" also a tribute to your dad.

Definitely my dad is a main character in the song.

Did you play the song for your father.

I recorded it and I sent it to him and he called me up. [Said in a deep voice] *He's not a real demonstrative kind of guy* [Laughs]. He was touched by it.

Tell us about "Straight to The Point."

Well, I don't have anything to give you but the truth and my honesty. There's a B. B. King quote that I love, that goes *"I always tell the truth, because then I don't have to remember what I said"* [Laughs]. That just cracks me. The song is about grabbing life with both hands, and saying *"This is who I am, this is what I do."*

"The Gathering Of Spirits" is a song about the renewal of friendship. Almost to the point where it doesn't matter whether it's a week since you last saw the person, or ten years have elapsed. They are able to pick up the thread almost as if they last met yesterday. Is that the scenario where that song came from.

The song came from a variety of places. It covers a lot of ground. It can be taken very literally, as meeting old friends later in life and picking up where you left off. There are *special people* in our lives that we do that with. There are places that we return to, that we can do that with. That's a wonderful continuity. There is also a spiritual context to that, in terms of it was written when someone I know passed. You know, I don't know what the next adventure brings, but I hope it will be a gathering of spirits.

The line in the song "life's a twinkling, that's for certain." That is just turning the old proverb "life is over in the twinkling of an eye" on its head.

Doesn't it feel that way? I mean, I think in terms of watching my daughter grow up. When she was a little baby people said *"Oh, it's going to go so fast."* You know, walking the floor late at night, you go *"Sure. It's going to go fast."* It was so fast. It was the twinkling of an eye. It's all the more important that we take a hold of these moments. The song is really a continuation of that theme. To appreciate the moment we have here, and hope for the gathering later.

"There And Back" struck me as the fun song in the collection, with a down to earth message - home is where the heart is. However, a happy road song is a very unnatural creation when you look at the work of other singer/songwriters.

Well, it is. Then again [Laughs] – I don't always kind of go with the flow [Laughs]. I liked the idea. I enjoy going different places. I love that different places have such personalities to them. Then again, there is no place like home, and that is kind of OK too.

Somewhere in the liner notes you use the word - wry. What I'm about to say is directly lifted from my review of your new album, and it's in reference to the song "Silver." Quote - "As love songs go, the wryly worded "Silver" focuses upon that time to come when we are no longer the svelte examples of manhood and womanhood that we once were."

[Laughs] I love that quote. I had a great time writing that song. It was actually written on a flight to Boston – well, half of it was. I was having such a great time with it – I had been giggling so much on the plane, that I continued writing it as I was driving up to Maine in a snowstorm. There is a lot of wryness in this whole album, but that song in particular. If I hadn't learned to laugh at myself, or chuckle at myself – I would have given up this thing a long time ago.

The songs cover the whole spectrum of life, and this could easily be a concept album. There are some serious bits, and some humorous bits. If you can see the connection between those two facets then you've figured what this album is about.

That's really true. Honestly you are the first person to say that out loud, but that's kind of what I hoped all along. That even in the serious songs, there's humour – there's a line in "Holy As The Day Is Spent," which is a very serious song in a way, that goes *"To pray as only laundry can."*

I took "I Heard An Owl" to be your 911 song.

It's not written anywhere in the album liner, or press literature, but it was written on the 12th. It explores the idea that people are capable of scary things, but we're also capable of the finest things. I believe in the latter, and that's kind of where my hope for the future lies. I guess I stand on, the best of what we are.

I presume your solution to the problem lies in the line – "The only peace this world will know, Can only come from love."

Martin Luther King said *"Hate is never conquered by hate. Hate is only conquered by love."* Maybe this song is a paraphrase of that, but I believe that the only real and long-term change that happens comes about through love.

Are "I'm Still Standing" and "I Heard An Owl" connected.

"Standing" was written about a month later. They are connected, but probably not how you think [Laughs]. I'm very much a peace activist. "I'm Still Standing" was written when the Bush Administration decided to go ahead and bomb Afghanistan. It was written, as if I was talking to George Bush and his Administration. As an activist, and a human, I didn't feel that it was the wisest choice, and the wisest way to try to make the world safer.

The closing track "The Things I've Gone And Done," almost, in a way, is a summation of the whole album.

I'm at a place in my life where I can look behind, and look ahead. It may be getting less on the one end than the other [Laughs]. I don't regret anything I've done, because I did it and I learned something. But I am going to regret what I didn't do, because I was afraid to. Things I was afraid to say, so I didn't say them when I should have. It's not about wanting to go back and change things. It's more the idea of, *knowing that now*. That makes me want to be more forthcoming with my life and with who I am. And not be afraid to try things, or do things, or grab on to life. Looking back now, those were the best things to do, even when they didn't work out.

In the penultimate verse you ask why "something good can get so twisted, That there's no semblance at all." Is that an expression of your frustration, as a couple of lines earlier you refer to the teachings of Jesus and Mohammed.

Some of the greatest teachers in the world have beautiful wonderful things to give, but sometimes people twist them around. Awful things have been done in the name of Mohammed and Jesus that have no semblance to truth. There is a frustration with that. There is a very strong fundamentalist movement in this country. I don't think fundamentalism is a spiritual movement, I believe it's a political movement. Regarding some of the lyric, I was told *"Carrie, that's gonna piss somebody off"* [We both laugh]. I said *"Well, so be it."* Whenever you are living your life in a really passionate and truthful way, you are going to make somebody upset. It's best just to be honest and let it fall where it may.

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 11/02

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