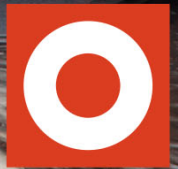


MICHAEL JAMES



MAR
CHE
SAN



- 
- 01 The Gate (Miracle In Tabriz)
 - 02 Love Is The Spirit Of Life
 - 03 Firm Steps & Strong Hearts
 - 04 Awakening
 - 05 Light On The Horizon
 - 06 Remover Of Difficulties
 - 07 Redemption
 - 08 Let's Keep It Real
 - 09 Illumine My Inner Being
 - 10 Shine Your Light On This Dark Night
 - 11 Joy Gives Us Wings

Produced & Mixed by Michael James
Co-produced by David Kahne & Urban Olsson

The *Marchesano* checklist had only four essentials: soulful guitar lines, uplifting grooves, fierce teamwork, and acknowledgment of the Maker. The resulting recording is a wordless expression of gratitude, inner reflection, and my passion for life. - MJ

Barcode = 1.25 x 0.5"

Place this box in desired
position on tray card.



www.alternatorrecords.com
www.michaeljamesproducer.com

© © 2015 Alternator Records LLC. All rights reserved.
Unauthorized reproduction is a violation of applicable laws.

Produced & Mixed by Michael James.
Co-produced by David Kahne and Urban Olsson.

Engineered by Jaben Pennell, Jack Daro, Chris Hesse, Warren "Wishnefsky" Wellen, Cynthia Catania, Eser Taskiran, David Zeman, Tom Kahre, Ty Beal, Dave Sherman, Sam Martinez, Bill Kole, Shane Gaalaas, Noam Levinberg, Urban Olsson, David Kahne, Rob Chiarelli, Michael James.

Mastered by David Donnelly for DNA Mastering and IndieProMix. www.IndieProMix.com
Management: Jan Seedman

Landscape photo by Frank Bevans. Portrait by Gustavo Corona. Album artwork design by Shannon Brown Designs. Additional design by Kristin Prentice of Sphinx Graphics.

All songs written by Michael James (aka Marchesano), except: "Let's Keep It Real" by Michael James and Bill Kole. "Illumine My Inner Being" and "Shine Your Light On This Dark Night" by Michael James and Urban Olsson. All songs © 2015 Marchesano Music admin. by Bug Music (ASCAP)

01 The Gate (Miracle In Tabriz)

Guitars, Rhodes: Michael James
Synthesizers, Percussion: Urban Olsson
Bass: Jack Daro
Drums: Jaben Pennell

02 Love Is The Spirit Of Life

Guitars, Mellotron: Michael James
Hammond B3: David Zeman
Bass: Sam Martinez
Drums: Jaben Pennell
Percussion: Scotty Kormos
Additional Acoustic Guitar: Urban Olsson
Additional Acoustic Guitar: Dave Sherman

03 Firm Steps & Strong Hearts

Guitars, Rhodes, Wurlitzer: Michael James
Keyboards: Eser Taskiran
Synthesizer, Acoustic Guitar: Bill Kole
Bass: Jack Daro
Drums: Shane Gaalaas



04 Awakening

Guitars: Michael James

Piano, Strings: Eser Taskiran

Mandolin, Rhodes, Mellotron: Cynthia Catania

Bass: Jack Daro

Drums: Jaben Pennell

05 Light On The Horizon

Guitars, Bass, Wurlitzer, Rhodes: Michael James

Grand Piano, Hammond B3: Eser Taskiran

Drums: Scotty Kormos

06 Remover Of Difficulties

Guitars: Michael James

Keyboards: Wishnefsky

Bass: Rob Chiarelli

Drums: Jaben Pennell

Additional Production: Brent Babow

07 Redemption

Guitars, Rhodes, Wurlitzer: Michael James

Synthesizers, Upright Bass: David Kahne

Keyboards, Synthetic Arrangement: Wishnefsky

Electric Bass: Rob Chiarelli

Drums: Karen Tepperberg

08 Let's Keep It Real

Guitars: Michael James

Keyboards: Wishnefsky

Bass: Dan Rothchild

Drums: Dan Potruch

09 Illumine My Inner Being

Guitars, Dobro, Bass, Wurlitzer: Michael James

Piano, Hammond B3, Mellotron: David Zeman

Drums: Jaben Pennell

10 Shine Your Light On This Dark Night

Guitars, Bass, Wurlitzer: Michael James

Keyboards: David Kahne

Hammond B3: David Zeman

Drums: Jaben Pennell

11 Joy Gives Us Wings

Guitars, Keyboards: Michael James

Bass: Jack Daro

Drums: Chris Hesse

Visit www.michaeljamesproducer.com

for expanded liner notes and a heartfelt, humorous
and irreverent essay by Tim Quirk.



Profound gratitude to my beloved wife and soulmate Irina Catherine Irvine, to my awesomely generous wingmen Urban Olsson & David Kahne, to all the terrific musicians who accompanied me, and to Jim Aschow for planting the seed and twisting my arm.

Special thanks to Franc Aledia, Tom Anderson, Roy Ashen, Brent Babow, Todd Bank, Ken Bogdanowicz, Kenny Brack, Bob Bradshaw, Steve Burdick, Alicia Champion, Brian Charles, Simon Cote, Joel Dubay, Robben Ford, Matt Forger, Wade Goeke, Gil Griffith, Walter Heath, Ryan Hudson, Joanie Irvine, Brian Larsen, Tien Lawrence, Danielle LoPresti, EveAnna Manley, Ray Maxwell, Bob Muller, Peter Neumann, Julia Albert Olsson, Kristin Prentice, Tim Quirk, Kenny Soule, Nelson Starr, Randy Smith, Bill Straw, Marek Stycos, John Tokarsky, David Weiss, Doug West, Paul Wolff.

Thank you, God of Mercy, Remover of Difficulties, for the precious gift of life, and for completely filling it with love and light. Amen.



Behind The Scenes: The Making of *Marchesano*

by Michael James

March 1, 2015, Simi Valley, California

When does an artist feel compelled to record a solo album? In my case, it serendipitously happened while remixing the Morcheeba song, "Crimson." While working on the mix, a new guitar amplifier arrived at my studio from Mesa/Boogie. Instead of giving Mesa a simple review of their new flagship amp, I played nine separate guitar parts--with unique tones, as if I'd used nine different amplifiers--and emailed them an instrumental version of the tune.

To my surprise, moments later my phone rang. Jim Aschow, president of Mesa, spiraled me into his joyful vortex, finally revealing: "Michael, It's time for you to make an artist album." I dismissed it immediately, advising I wasn't interested in touring the country in a beat up van at age 50. I am comfortable with my life as a record producer and mix engineer. Jim abided but persisted, saying that every time I sent the company audio clips and amp settings, his customers asked where they could find more material from the guitarist. Jim assured me that Mesa would link to my album from their website - a virtual version of the van and touring. Literally thousands of people could gain exposure to the music, every day.

I decided to go for it. I made some loose guidelines for myself. First, the songs and performances would come straight from the heart. No commercial considerations. Second, the guitar would "sing" with minimal effects, mostly plugged straight into Mesa amplifiers. Third, there would be no gratuitous pyrotechnics or "shredding." The arrangements would rely on as few instruments as possible, ensuring expressive and audible details in the mix. Finally, the song titles would reflect various steps along the path of a spiritual journey in a physical world.

The most important criterion, however, was that I make music that I would love for the rest of my life.

Music for *me* that might in some way inspire others to feel joined on their path.

Here are the stories behind the songs on Marchesano.

The Gate (Miracle In Tabriz)

How do you keep your cool when you know you're about to pay the ultimate price for your faith?

The Gate comes to me via a mystical genesis. It was inspired by the cool, steadfast sense of purpose that a prophet known as The Bab (translation: The Gate) carried within him on the day of his martyrdom. According to Baha'i tradition, The Bab was giving an interview in his cell when the military guards fetched him. Seeing their concern about the disturbing task at hand, he told them not to worry because they were following orders--and they would not be able to fulfill their mission until he completed his. The Bab and one of his devotees were strung up in front of the execution wall, and a regiment of 250 troops fired 750 bullets at them. When the smoke cleared, the ropes were severed by the bullets. The Bab had vanished. Eventually The Bab was found back in his cell, completing his interview. He told his captor, "I've completed my mission; now you may complete yours." The next round of 750 shots mutilated



the two bodies--with the exception of the prophet's face, which was unscratched. Darkness filled the sky as a rogue storm hit, and the newspapers of the day (AD 1850, Tabriz, Iran) reported the event as a "miracle." Most miracles have scientific explanations. I'm intrigued by The Bab's state of mind during the time that elapsed *between* facing the two firing squads, which I imagine was characterized by a calm sense of steadfastness, love and purpose. By using a repetitive ostinato bass line, I capture a feeling of "staying the course" punctuated with the "James Brown" E9 hits to represent the arrest and subsequent gunfire. The feel of this piece unfolds our natural curiosity with "miracles." We deeply seek understanding in stories of others and their faith, their miracles. But ultimately it is our own adherence to faith, no matter how fierce the gunfire, that leads us to miracles.

Love Is The Spirit Of Life (and Illumine My Inner Being)

Two songs, one laptop, 45 minutes and a mountain.

The lead guitar melodies and solos to Love Is The Spirit Of Life and Illumine My Inner Being were recorded together, in less than an hour, while my wife (Irina) and I were on vacation in Mammoth Lakes, California for our 20th anniversary. The only thing on our schedule that was cast in stone was a 45 minute conference call that she had to make. I had already recorded pretty exciting demos of both tunes, so I had no reservations about playing "keeper" parts over unfinished rhythm tracks. I was pretty excited to record these tunes because they had been swimming around in my head for several weeks, and I was dying to get them out. Interestingly, the intro fingerpicked part to Spirit was recorded several years earlier on a Tele as a quick sketch of an idea. I finally found a home for it! I brought along a laptop, a DI/Reamp box and a Tom Anderson Cobra Special (like a Les Paul TV Special with P90 pickups) and played the lead guitar lines directly into Pro Tools, monitoring my performance through an entry level amp simulator plug-in. Both performances were completed and the "studio" was disassembled and returned to my backpack by the time Irina finished her call.

When I made it home to Southern California, I opened up the laptop and reamped the songs through a couple different amplifiers. Jaben Pennell replaced my demo drums with live drums, and Sammy Martinez replaced my demo bass on Spirit. I wish recording original material was always so easy!

Firm Steps & Strong Hearts

Faith yields the power to transform the world, one step at a time.

Faith is a powerful presence in my life. No one can prove the existence of God. But proof is not what makes faith. I believe in a God who connects us to everything and each other. Faith comforts me, gives me strength, and orchestrates my purpose. While I see myself as happy and healthy, my faith thrives within my diligence to serve it.

Firm Steps & Strong Hearts is layered, not unlike our complex lives, with contrasting tones. Our glorious world moves in rhythms that soar around our diversity. Despite these sonic differences, the various parts agree to work together. Like our humanity, coexistence requires a conscious choice to "make it work." And when it works, all voices rise higher, together.

Firm steps toward the horizon, strong hearts open to the changes in the path that gets us there.

Awakening

Is it jazzy folk music, or jazz for folks? Is it about waking from sleep, or a new lease on life?

I composed Awakening as the leadoff track to set the the tone of the album, and to harmonically resolve into Light On The Horizon. As happens so often in life, the plan was perfect on paper, but not in practice. One can argue that nobody listens to "albums" anymore--but I do, so the playing sequence was important to me. While my album contains elements of jazz (abundant improvisation, Lydian Chromatic Concept, etc.), Awakening is the only song that might actually be mistaken to be jazz.

I sent the tune to the guys at Mesa/Boogie, and they couldn't believe that the clean, pure, expressive jazzy tone emanated from a half-stack amp they considered to be a Marshall-esque rock monster, the Royal Atlantic RA-100. Never judge a book by its cover. The guitar was a Tom Anderson Hollow Tele plugged straight in, no effects, not even a pick... One of my favorites!

Light On The Horizon

A sword is not ready for action until it's been through the fire...again.

Two of my best friends had multiple miscarriages. Another friend was concerned about losing custody of his children in a divorce. During this time, I was meditating on the relationships of John the Baptist to Jesus Christ, and of The Bab to Baha'u'llah. I was also pondering the act of choice in maintaining a positive mental attitude during times of adversity, and that tests are a necessary part of life. What does not kill us, make us stronger.

Inspired by all of those things, this song came together faster than expected. My brain was looping an unusual drum beat without the kick drum on the downbeat. I quickly programmed this experimental beat and plugged an acoustic guitar's piezo pickup into directly into Pro Tools. This is definitely NOT the way I typically record acoustic guitar. Carefully placed vintage German microphones--not direct boxes--provide the familiar rich tone of so many classic hits. When I sketch ideas, however, I create them as quickly as possible, and then I edit them later when I am in a different headspace. I didn't risk losing the mood by setting up a mic stand. My goal was to capture the initial spark before it became diluted or over analyzed. Despite the "demo" tone, I liked what I heard from the acoustic guitar, so I did the same thing with the lead electric guitar. I didn't really think about what I was doing: I was just capturing the vibe--a flowing stream of conscious improvisation.

Several days later, I returned to the idea and made a few edits to my performance. That first performance definitely captured the spark. I subsequently tried to improve upon it but I did not like the "improved" version nearly as much. It just didn't feel as emotionally resonant to me.

On the final mix, Scotty Kormos plays a better version of my drum part into Toontrack Superior 2 virtual drum instrument. It's the only song on the album that does not have acoustic drums recorded in a studio...or living room. I love Scotty's performance because it wasn't simply about the groove--it was also about supporting the melody. Not a lot of drummers think about the melody, but Scotty does. As a result, I was inspired to play bass and electric piano overdubs. Eser Taskiran played grand piano and Hammond

B3 organ from his studio in Istanbul, Turkey. While many people criticize modern technology for myriad reasons, I embrace the fact that it allows us to collaborate instantly with other folks on the opposite side of the planet. If it weren't for technology, I would've never learned that Taskiran is one of my musical soul brothers.

Remover Of Difficulties

I thought the album was finished, and then this song happened.

This tune was composed and recorded after I thought Marchesano was in the can. The Rover-esque rhythm guitar riff had been languishing on mothballs for six years before I found a use for it. I resurrected it to demonstrate to Brent Babow, my IndieProMix business partner, how to effectively use Pro Tools as a composition tool. Upon looping an excerpt of the riff over a drum groove, I improvised a melody over the chorus in the style of B.B. King. As I was playing the part, Brent and I smiled at each other, laughing out loud from the joy of stumbling across something so simple, but cool. My improvised jam was about 75% good, so I developed the final 25% over the next hour, unintentionally locked into a finger-style performance without a plectrum. We both thought it was hilarious that I was playing such a heavy tune without a pick, especially considering that I don't have very good finger-style chops. Fortunately, the contrast of fleshy fingertips versus hard plastic is a sonic juxtaposition that intrigues me. The amp setting for the main melody employs less gain and sustain than the rhythm riff does, which seems backwards...but it works.

Redemption

Modulating from vibey minor verses to majestic major choruses represents second chances and endless possibilities.

The first song I recorded, Redemption, borrowed and expanded upon Morcheeba's "Crimson" chord progression. Three friends jumped in to form the rhythm section: Rob Chiarelli played a groovy Fender bass part, David Kahne played upright bass and synthesizers and Wishnefsky arranged the synthetic breakdown at the first half of the third chorus. Driven by programmed drums at the time, it felt like an

interesting trip-hop song, but it didn't feel like *my* song...yet.

The missing ingredient arrived via Cynthia Catania, singer of Saucy Monky. We were mixing one of her songs when I remarked that I really loved the feel of her drummer. A few days later, on my birthday, Cynthia phoned to tell me that she had a special gift for me: Karen Teperberg would play live acoustic drums on Redemption from her studio in Israel. I uploaded the Pro Tools session from California. A few days later Karen sent her drum tracks. I was overwhelmed with tears of joy as I listened to the playback. Not only were the drums perfect, I was blown away that one of my dear friends loved me enough to hire Sting's drummer to play on my record! I'd spent my entire adult life taking other people's music to the next level, but at that moment I was humbled knowing that my friends and colleagues selflessly rallied to support me. The experience of listening to my song come together so perfectly was such an emotional rush. I will never forget it.

With Redemption in the bag, I found a sound that felt organic and honest to me. Not ironically, Redemption gave me the confidence to move forward without falling into the trap of trying to impress other guitar players.

Let's Keep It Real

Jazz-rock fusion of the '70s remains one of my guilty pleasures. This tune borrows some of the classic tones of the era, while mashing up a Hendrix-esque riff with a Zeppelin-esque bridge, some "expensive" Steely Dan chords, and a modified blues progression.

Propelled by a rhythm guitar riff inspired by Jimi Hendrix's Spanish Castle Magic, Let's Keep It Real was originally destined for another artist's album. It featured lyrics about two lovers with different priorities: one of them was focused on a big house and fancy car, while the other was more into spiritual, nonmaterial pursuits. Two good people, but they didn't connect.

Ultimately the song is about tolerance and purpose, and not becoming distracted by ephemeral things. Here, I perform a guitar-interplay lyrically delivering the conversation between these two lovers. They are calm and reasonable at the beginning and the end of the discussion, but they become

passionate in the middle, when tempers flare and restraint goes out the window. I distinctly remember struggling to play the chorus melody because I had not practiced. It wasn't under my fingers, so when I arrived at the improvised solo, I cut loose with reckless abandon. After I got that frustration off my chest, I settled into a nice easy groove for the final verse and chorus.

Incidentally, Let's Keep It Real is the only song on the album that does not feature a custom boutique Tom Anderson Guitarworks model in the lead role. The tune gets its '70s fusion vibe from a Gibson ES335 plugged straight into my Mesa/Boogie Mark I combo amp. The rhythm section of Dan Rothchild and Dan Potruch was recorded live, during the middle of the night, at Bill Kole's very small private studio with no room mics... mainly because we couldn't fit them! Certain bits of phrasing were rhythmically ambiguous, residing someplace between straight 16th-notes and eighth-note triplets. We amused ourselves, and ensured rhythmic precision, by singing and fingering the word "Lipitor" in unison during the ambiguous phrases. Rumor has it that Paul McCartney sang "scrambled eggs" to the melody of Yesterday while developing it. Perhaps my song might have become a classic if we sang "Hollandaise" or some other cholesterol-laden breakfast choice.

Illumine My Inner Being

I love the process of solving a great mystery, but sometimes the universe makes it easy.

This song did not feel at all like work. Everything about it was easy. A big chunk of the "composed" portion of the melody was sung by Urban Olsson as an improvisation during the same writing session as Shine Your Light. My guitar performance was nailed on the first take. We instantly captured the vibe. I'm convinced this tune was a gift because all I had to do was stay out of the way and let nature take its course.

Shine Your Light On This Dark Night

Inspired by a midnight prayer for love, this tune sounds like my soul sometimes feels.

Shine Your Light's chorus borrows Derek & the Dominos' chord progression from Bell Bottom Blues. As with Illumine My Inner Being, Urban Olsson composed a high percentage of the verse melody as he sang

into a cheap Shure SM58 over my demo track. He beautifully defined it in a single take during our writing session. As I improvised the guitar solo, I was thinking about a midnight prayer which speaks to gratitude, contemplation, accountability and pure love. That beautiful prayer, which contains the words "enlighten my sight by beholding Thy lights in this dark night", found expression in this song. This tune has become a prayer for me. I hope it might do so for you.

Joy Gives Us Wings

Happiness is a choice--and a prescription for life.

According to Abdu'l Bahá, "Joy gives us wings! In times of joy our strength is more vital, our intellect keener, and our understanding less clouded. We seem better able to cope with the world and to find our sphere of usefulness."

The verses of this song are anchored by a familiar earthy riff reminiscent of The Who's classic, I'm Free. The choruses, however, blast off into unexpected harmonic territory, "boldly going where no one has gone before." The Star Trek reference seems appropriate because, in the show, poverty and hunger have been eradicated. Free from the constraints of struggling just to survive, self-realization became the norm. The populace of entire planets pulled together to achieve common goals, for the greater good. I dream of this fiction becoming reality. Maybe we can't change the world overnight, but we can improve ourselves in an instant.

Reprising the "birthday drums" theme, Chris Hesse visited on my 50th, and gave me a gift wrapped flash drive containing his rocking drum performance. I was flying pretty high on that joyous day!

Marchesano Musings - A Heartfelt, Humorous and Irreverent Essay by Tim Quirk

Michael James is not like you or I. He's far, far nicer than any human being, particularly one in the music business, has any right to be.

We first met way back in 1988, when my band spent two days in the middle of a long national tour banging out some demos at a little studio in Venice Beach called Radio Tokyo. Michael was assigned as our engineer. Radio Tokyo was a bit of a punk Mecca, in that heroes of ours such as the Minutemen had recorded there. So Michael wasn't really what we were expecting.

Most people you'd encounter in a situation like that would look a certain way. Tattoos up and down your arms weren't yet de rigueur, but they weren't uncommon. Complexions were pale, clothing was unkempt and re-used multiple days in a row, smiles were things you deployed after saying something cutting.

Michael was something else entirely: an incredibly fit, healthily tanned, bike-riding vegetarian, who introduced himself as a born again virgin and eagerly expounded on his Baha'i faith when asked. He didn't curse (and in fact called our label to make sure it was OK with them that I swore repeatedly in many of our songs). If you read Terry Pratchett's Discworld novels, he was a LOT like Captain Carrot. If you have no idea who that is, Kenneth from 30 Rock or Ned Flanders from The Simpsons are close approximations - characters who at first seem like easy jokes because they're impossibly guileless, but who ultimately reveal themselves as admirably unflappable heroes, because no matter how terrible the



provocation, they never drop to everyone else's level. Each of them, like Michael, is far tougher than you realize, and they prevail in most situations because they believe the things they do so completely and honestly.

We had no idea what to make of him. But dang (since this is Michael's album, I am spelling that word with an "ng" instead of an "mn," as I normally would), was he an excellent engineer and musician. He worked incredibly fast, got brilliant sounds, and politely made numerous smart arrangement and harmony suggestions. We were so impressed, we asked him to produce our next LP.

Being Michael, he wound up spending his entire fee buying more studio time for us when we ran over the initial allotment our recording budget had funded. When we objected that we couldn't ask him for a favor like that, he dismissed our objections by explaining he considered what we were working on to be his record, too.

When we came back to Radio Tokyo a third time to record yet again, Michael said he didn't want any money, but he did think we needed a Mesa Boogie amp to get the right guitar sound, and if the label would fund that and let him keep it afterward, he'd consider everything square.

So, I count Michael as a generous friend, and I was suitably honored when he asked me if I'd be willing to write some liner notes for this record. I was also worried – I'm a gleefully profane, punk-inspired, meat-loving atheist, so it wasn't clear how helpful my musings might be on an instrumental work chock full of intricate guitar leads that Michael described as "my love letter to God."

I do not believe in the God to whom Michael James has written this love letter, but I do believe good music and better friends to share it with can be a powerful source of transcendent experiences. So let's see what happens. I'm going to play the record, and write down how it makes me feel and what it makes me think. Wheeee!

(Ed. note: The final playing order of the album changed after this piece was written.)

Track 1: “Love is the Spirit of Life”

Now, see, right at the beginning we have a perfect example of how Michael and I differ. Not only can he actually play his instrument, but the sounds he chooses to make with it are so darn nice. The chorus lick here sounds like a great Sheryl Crow melody, the notes she sings in a lyric about just chilling happily with friends, in a song that plays from radios everywhere all summer long and instantly transports you back to that time whenever you hear it for years afterward. I enjoy tunes like that as much as the next guy, but I'm also suspicious of them, because in real life those friends die unexpectedly, and that never seems to happen in Sheryl Crow songs – at least not the ones they play on the radio.

Track 2: “Make Firm Our Steps”

Hmm. Some pleasingly ominous hints of darkness in the opening notes, so maybe someone will die after all, just like in real life. And maybe someone has, or will, but if so that just seems to give Michael something to overcome with chunky power chords played with that Rockman effect the guy in Boston supposedly invented – I do not know if it's true, but I heard the Rockman began life as a way for the guitar player in Boston to work late at night in his apartment without bugging his neighbors. Now that I think about it, that is sooooo Michael James – he loves to rock, but would hate to disturb anyone while doing so. Which leaves me picturing Michael riding his bicycle all around and through the ominous darkness that began the song, shouting, “Hey! Guys! Check this out! It's neat!” Good for him.

Track 3: “Awakening”

Now we're getting somewhere. To me, this sounds like some Smooth Jazz dudes playing for themselves in a bar on a Sunday afternoon, cuz neither of the two sad drunks who are their putative audience are paying them any attention. All over the country – all over the world – there are people who are fantastic at what they do, doing it for little reward and less recognition. This is not necessarily a good thing, but sometimes just doing the thing you're good at is enough.

Track 4: “Light on the Horizon”

A long, overnight drive. You want it to be morning, cuz then you'll be there. At first you think you see a hint of dawn, but it turns out it's just the security lights on some industrial building in the middle of nowhere. So, hours later, you don't believe the real morning light at first. But it gets brighter and

brighter, and wakes you up enough to finish the drive.

Track 5: “The Gate”

This one’s a bit prog rock-y for my tastes, so I see a bunch of dancing dwarves in front of this gate. That’s OK, they’re small, you can kick ‘em aside. But then you have to deal with an inscrutable-looking druid. He’s probably going to ask you a bunch of riddles, and hurl you into some pit if you guess wrong. But, because you are a courageous and noble young elf on a quest, you foil his schemes by engaging him in a conversation about distortion pedals. Turns out he’s a fan of the Big Muff fuzz pedal, too, and lets you pass.

Track 6: “Redemption”

I think you have to do something terrible in order to be redeemed, and since, unlike the god he believes in, Michael James doesn’t know how to be mean or cruel, I’m not sure what’s in need of redeeming here. Maybe the fact that he asked me to write these liner notes, and now here I am kicking petty dirt all over his beautiful creations? Then again, he asked me, so maybe he recognizes his spiritual yang needs a little earthly yin to hold it in check, maybe?

Track 7: “Let’s Keep it Real”

OK, I’m getting weirded out, now, because I wrote that last sentence just as track 6 was ending and having no idea what track 7 was called, but suddenly it’s like the record is talking back to me. Pretty sure some folks are having sex, here. Or maybe they’re just dancing super suggestively. Both can be transcendent, when done right – which usually means unthinkingly.

Track 8: “Illumine My Inner Being”

You know what can be just as good (sometimes even better) than sex and dancing? Just spending a lazy afternoon walking around with someone you love who loves you back the precise same amount, saying nothing, just smiling at each other. Perhaps that is how Michael feels about God. Which one of us loves him enough to tell him “illumine” is not a verb anyone really uses?

Track 9: “That I May See Thy Light”

Judging by that riffing, the light is pretty much everywhere. Really, it takes more effort NOT to see it. Sure, people die, including you. But do you know how insanely the odds were stacked against anyone you know ever existing in the first place? This does not mean you have to feel guilty for just wanting to watch TV some nights. There's light there, too.

Track 10: "Joy Gives Us Wings"

Again, because I am profane and literal minded, I am picturing a waitress. Her nametag says Joy. And she comps us our chicken wings, cuz the cook screwed up the rest of the order. But sometimes it's those little acts of kindness that shift an otherwise miserable day into something sublime. And now that you're noticing, you realize Joy's got an amazing ability to just be nice to everyone she's serving, even though this truck stop attracts a rough and unseemly looking crowd. You get the feeling everyone else in the joint recognizes this ability, too, even if only subconsciously. Nobody messes with Joy. Everyone she serves gets back on the road a little bit happier than when they stopped. And the joy spreads, in tiny little increments.

So, that's what I got after my first listen, and multiple further listens found me inserting little more than commas here and there. My reactions feel smaller than Michael's ambitions, but I am small-minded.

Michael wrote a love letter to God; I've contented myself with writing my own to Michael.

I think they're kind of the same thing.

-**Tim Quirk**, front guy in Too Much Joy turned Google exec, January 2014

Orchestrations of a Layered Soul

by Raffi Minasian

March 2015, Bainbridge Island, Washington

Michael and I first met as kids in school. I wasn't a guitarist. I played violin. When we realized we had similar musical interests we got together to play music. We were so young. Both with our bushy 70's hair – MJ's was beach water blonde from all the sun, mine jet black from the Middle East. Totally visually different, but connected by music. We started playing and that was the first time I remember thinking that I didn't have to play violin in an orchestra. The voice of my violin could be heard in other ways and I could be the one to release it. I started down a path with jazz, bluegrass, blues, and roots music. I'm not a great song writer or player by any means, but the joy of playing is still with me as it was in those very first days when my eyes and ears were opened up by a 17 year old sound alchemist who would go on to do the very same thing with hundreds of other players and seekers on their sonic journey.



In this fresh and driving account of Michael's journey, we're treated to the orchestrations of a layered soul. No one can truly capture a spirit. But, you can signal a moment in time, a fresh slice of feeling and hold it in your ears through a recording. Each of these tracks come together in unique ways, some informed by memories of Michael's past, some from literal musical exchanges with other artists, but all are willing gifts for our ears. This emotional soul-stirring magic can only come from someone who's lived a thoughtful and spiritually adventurous life, thousands of lives before, and thousands of lives to come. The gift of these songs is how they capture a journey in sound, an epic voicing, outside the boundaries of time. Together with some of the most talented musicians, each song becomes a roadmap to a future that unfolds in celebration of our faith – not a thick, burdened faith, but a vast open distance filled with sound. *Marchesano* is more than a collection of songs: it is a brilliant sonic map, charted from one man's journey - a map that leads any soul toward joyful awakening.

Raffi Minasian is a designer, writer, and musician with a passion for creative adventure and arts education. He currently serves as Chairman of the Board of ZooLabs, a California based music incubator.