

MICHAEL JAMES



Shelter in Place

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Produced by: Michael James, Urban Olsson, David Kahne, Aaron Durr, Brian Joseph Kenny and Eric Colvin
Mixed by: Michael James

Engineered by: Every musician on the album, self recorded remotely at home during the pandemic lockdown of 2020

Mastered by: David Donnelly at DNA Mastering

Executive Producers: Chris Jansen and Tim Roth

Artwork/Design: Jeremy Sutherland

Photography: Christina Joy

CG Images/Michael James Photo: Tim Roth

Tim Quirk singer/lyricist

Too Much Joy

“Shelter in place” was probably a useful metaphor, in the before times. These days, it’s a phrase one can’t help but take literally, as most all of us have direct experience with doing exactly that, and going a little crazier as a result.

So this is a concept album that’s a little less conceptual than either the artist himself or his listeners might desire; what might have been received as an interesting story a year ago now feels like a running commentary on our shared reality. It’s about what happens when some of the people we love are too far away, and the rest are far too close. It’s about being isolated, but not alone. Because it’s by Michael James, it’s also about the hope/belief that there’s some transcendent spiritual reward at the end of it all. But because he made it in 2020, I also hear a hint of fear there might not be, or, possibly worse, that there is but we might not qualify.

The songs are filled with car crashes real and imagined, breakups impending and past, and deaths both spiritual and corporeal. You’ll hear characters singing about devastating pain, feeling alone, and discovering, “Hope is another lie.”

You’ll also hear them singing about love -- it’s just that they’ve learned love can’t prevent any of these tragedies. Listen to the songs in sequence in one frame of mind, and they’ll tell you a linear narrative about a troubled couple, an automobile accident, a man

who can’t bear the loss of the woman he loves, and an eventual reunion in the afterlife (or maybe it’s just happening in outer space). Play them again, though, and you can project an entirely different story onto the same characters, the same gorgeous guitar parts, and the same haunting organs. Because the story’s not being told to you, it’s being made up by you, because you’ve been sheltering in place too long and every mundane action is a reminder that no actions are mundane right now, because life is far scarier than it’s supposed to be. When did that happen, and why are the people I love only so much help in the midst of it?

In that milieu, a sentiment such as “Nothing Lasts Forever” can be a cause for hope as well as woe -- if everything’s temporary, even the terrifying stuff has to end at some point. By the same token, “You Think It’s Over But It’s Not” can be bad news about our failure to bend the curve of the pandemic, or good news about that afterlife you were hoping for.

Similarly, songs you think you already know reveal new layers. Michael’s rearrangement of the Beatles’ “Something” has no words, because we can supply them ourselves, but when we do we

realize that, in this context, “I don’t want to leave her now” is the key line. Michael’s version of “Fly Me to the Moon” does include the words you know, but here the sentiment they impart is less about being giddy with love, and more about a genuine desire to get the hell off this dying planet.

As always with Michael, the songs are impeccably produced while still feeling loose and live. Without that combination of professionalism and heart, the journey this record sends you on might feel too harrowing. But there’s something reassuring about just how good at their jobs every player on this record is -- they might not know what’s lying in wait at the center of these songs, but they don’t sound afraid of learning; they sound downright eager.

So let them guide you into the heart of darkness and, just possibly, through it.

Let’s be honest: you can’t go anywhere else right now. ■

01 When The Penny Drops

(Michael James Marchesano)

Michael James: Guitar

Eric Colvin: Drums, Bass, Rhodes

02 Come Back Lover

(Michael James Marchesano, Aaron Durr)

Aaron Durr: Vocals, Keyboards, Drums

Michael James: Guitars, Fretless Bass, Dobro, Keyboards

Tell me everything will be okay
I want to hold you, but I can't today
I fight the feeling, but I'm stuck at home
I try to tell myself I'm not alone

*Come back lover, find your way
Come back home to yesterday
Our empty place reminds me
The weather today will eventually break
So I'll shelter in our space
And I'll imagine your embrace
Pretend that everything's okay*

Turn off the TV 'cause they've all gone mad
It might be funny if it weren't so sad
Outside my window is the Twilight Zone
You're out there somewhere, too—you're not alone

*Come back lover, find your way
Come back home to yesterday
Our empty place reminds me
The weather today will eventually break
So I'll shelter in our space
And I'll imagine your embrace
Pretend that everything's okay
Come back lover, find your way*

I hear your voice before I even dial
I see your picture and it makes me smile
But any hour we spend on any phone
It doesn't help the fact we're still alone

*Come back lover, find your way
Come back home to yesterday
Our empty place reminds me
The weather today will eventually break
So I'll shelter in our space
And I'll imagine your embrace
Pretend that everything's okay
Come back lover, find your way*

03 Nothing Lasts Forever

(Michael James Marchesano)

Urban Olsson: Vocals, Bass

Michael James: Guitars, Rhodes, Wurlitzer,
Mellotron, Piano, Drums

Did you ever love somebody so much
That you'd give up your life?
If you'd really take a bullet for love
Then you know why I'd die for you

*Baby nothing lasts forever
I'm gonna love you dead or alive
If we crash the car together
We collide, we're beautified, and we're still alive*

I've been thinking 'bout the home that we built
and the garden we tend
All the love we made and even the spilled milk
I don't want it to end

*Baby nothing lasts forever
I'm gonna love you dead or alive
If we crash the car together
We collide, we're beautified, and we're still alive*

Let me explain
Cause I really don't want to freak you
Everything's here and now
You can see it if you open your eyes
I can't complain
Even though I can't write a haiku:
*We're all gonna die
Live a little while we can
Is this a haiku?*

Are you mindful, do you live in the moment?
Everything is right here, right now
Are you waiting for the Day of Atonement?
Are you feeling aroused?

*Baby nothing lasts forever
I'm gonna love you dead or alive
If we crash the car together
We collide, we're beautified, and we're still alive
I don't wanna grow old without you
I'm pretty sure you feel the same
When our song becomes a curfew
We collide, we're beautified, and we're still alive*

I don't want to be the last one standing
But I don't want you to go it alone
So let's make a deal that we move on and find love
Life is for the living

04 Learning To Live Without You

(Michael James Marchesano)

Franc Aledia: Vocals

Michael James: Guitars, Bass, Rhodes

Warren "Wishnefsky" Wellen: Synthesizers

Eric Colvin: String Arrangement

Jaben Pennell: Drums

Chris Jansen, Jeremy Sutherland:

Additional Backing Vocals

I woke up today but it wasn't a dream
The terrible truth is surreal
You snuck out the back around midnight it seems
And made your escape in the field

It wasn't a plan, just an innocent fling
You were living your life unconfined
You couldn't have known that your impulse would bring
Such sorrow to those left behind

There's so much pain, I can't contain it
I'm absolutely devastated... I'll never see my baby again

*Is your soul flying free? (Is your soul flying free)
Do you still think of me? (Is your soul flying)
Is happiness a silent song,*

*A tiny dot in a perfect storm?
Oh my God!
Will my tears flood the streets?
As I learn to live without you
Learning to love, learning to live
I'm learning to live without you*

Forgive and forget is a timeless cliché
There's nothing you did to forgive
I'm hanging on memories of you, yesterday
Maybe forgetting's a gift

The way that you laid on my lap every night
The way that you looked in my soul with your eyes
The way that you loved, the way that I pray
The way that I feel, I can't make it today

There's so much pain, I can't contain it
I'm absolutely devastated... I'll never see my baby again

*Is your soul flying free? (Is your soul flying free)
Do you still think of me? (Is your soul flying)
Is happiness a silent song,
A tiny dot in a perfect storm?
Oh my God
Will my tears flood the streets?
As I learn to live without you
Learning to love, learning to live
I'm learning to live without you*

05 Scraping The Guard Rail (All The Way Down)

(Michael James Marchesano, Warren Wellen)

Michael James: Guitar, Fretless Bass

Warren Wellen: Keyboards, Fender Bass, Percussion

Rob Ahlers: Drums

Chris Jansen: Additional Synthesizer

06 I Can't Take It

(Michael James Marchesano, Julia Albert)

Julia Albert: Vocals

Michael James: Guitars, Keyboards,

Bass, Drum Programming

Jaben Pennell: Drums

Pick a fight, make a scene, fuel the fire with gasoline
In summertime, summer heat,
Your little jokes are turning mean
Hold it in, building steam, I'm tired of this old routine
It's killing me that you won't look me in the eye
Cigarette, I thought you quit,
Another way to make some distance
You must want to be miles away from me

*Losing again, I picture the end, I can't take it, no
I know how you get, let's not pretend, I can't take it
Losing again, picture the end, I can't take it, oh
I know how you get*

Passing mood, a waking dream, something makes me
want to scream
About to tip, bite me lip, gulp my wine instead of sip
Nagging pain, a little death, see what I've been up against,
oh well
It's much bigger than me now
An awkward pose, the words I chose, my hands don't
know where they should go
I don't want to think, I don't want to know,
I don't want to know

*Losing again, I picture the end, I can't take it, no
I know how you get, let's not pretend, I can't take it
Losing again, picture the end, I can't take it, oh
I know how you get and I can't take it*

07 Save Me Tonight

(Michael James Marchesano)

Franc Aledia: Vocals
Michael James: Guitars, Fretless Bass,
Keyboards, Strings
Aaron Durr: Wurliitzer, String Quartet Arrangement
Eric Colvin: Grand Piano, Rhodes, Hammond B3
Jaben Pennell: Drums

I thought I had my shit together
I did everything right
Nonetheless I really need you
To save me tonight
I'm taking inventory
On paper we're fine

It's just the same old story
I'm barely toeing the line

*Why do I feel like I'm alone?
Like nobody's home
I need to know
Does anyone feel?
I turned on the lights
But I'm empty inside
I need to know
Can somebody heal me?
And save me tonight?*

I never tried to change the weather
I took it in stride
When you broke, I made you better
I gave you my life
I never asked for any glory
I only did what I do
But can I make it to the morning?
Can I fall into you?

*Why do I feel like I'm alone?
Like nobody's home
I need to know
Does anyone feel?
I turned on the lights
But I'm empty inside
I need to know
Can somebody heal me?
And save me tonight?*

Am I alone, am I the only one who's ever felt this way?
Unplug the phone and sink like a stone, or get my ass in
gear and choose to live to love another day?

*Why do I feel like I'm alone?
Like nobody's home
I need to know
Does anyone feel?
I turned on the lights
But I'm empty inside
I need to know
Can somebody heal me?
And save me tonight?*

08 I'll Be Here

(Michael James Marchesano, Aaron Durr)

Aaron Durr: Vocals, Keyboards, Percussion
Michael James: Guitars, Fretless Bass
Eric Colvin: Drums, Rhodes

I feel you struggle to manage
When you're out there on your own
But I know you'll rise to the challenge
When you see you're not alone
When you're feeling like you're running on a treadmill
I can promise that I'll get you up the big hill
I may be quiet, but I'm here

*When you need a friend to lend
a helping hand I'll be here
When you need me next to you
to see you through I'll be here*

I can't imagine how painful
Your journey must have been
But I've seen the diamonds in your soul
And you're gonna shine again
When you get a little better at the life thing
You're gonna notice that you got a couple strong wings
Take a step, I'm by your side

*When you need a friend to lend
a helping hand I'll be here
When you need me next to you
to see you through I'll be here*

I know that you try so hard
To make it by yourself
Just know that I'm never far
And I'll be there to lift you up

*When you need a friend to lend
a helping hand I'll be here
When you need me next to you
to see you through I'll be here
When you're in your darkest hour
and sweet is sour I'll be here
When everything is upside down*

*I'll be around, I'll be here
I'll be here
I see the diamond in your soul
You're gonna shine again*

09 Push On Through (Marchesano Remix)

(Colin Keenan)

Colin Keenan: Vocals, Keyboards,
Acoustic & Rhythm Guitars
Michael James: Lead & Rhythm Guitars, Bass,
Keyboards, String Arrangement
Shawn Pierce: Piano
Joe Travers: Drums
Chris Jansen: Synthesizer

Is this the life you were born to? Nobody warned you
Instead they told you everything would be ok
And everyone reminds you - Of what's behind you
But you're not the same
And if you think that you could give it one more try
It doesn't matter what the world will say
When you don't give a damn

*What's the use in caring - when everyone is daring
you to do
Just what they want you to - Don't you
Make your mind up as you see fit - You gotta believe
it - to make it true
And push on through*

And all the dreams and all the demons -
They lie there screamin'
And you couldn't stand to watch them as they die
Pretend you didn't notice - You found what hope is
It's just another lie
And did you think that you were given just one chance
It doesn't matter how the world can break you
When you don't give a damn

*What's the use in caring - when everyone is daring you
to think and do
Just what they want you to - Don't you
Make your life up as you see fit - You gotta
believe it - to make it true
Push on through*

10 Something (arranged and reharmonized by Michael James)

(George Harrison)

Michael James: Lead Guitar & Solos,
Acoustic Guitar, Vocals
James Zota Baker: Slide Guitar
Warren "Wishnfsky" Wellen: Keyboards
David Zeman: Hammond C3
Harry Metzler: String Arrangement
Sam Martinez: Bass
Jaben Pennell: Drums

11 I Can't Make You Love Me If You Don't (I'm Drifting Alone)

(Michael James Marchesano, Franc Aledia)

Franc Aledia: Vocals
Michael James: Guitars, Bass
Warren "Wishnfsky" Wellen: Synthesizers
Eric Colvin: Piano
Chris Hesse: Drums
Kenny Brack: Additional Production

It's only been a day since you walked away
And now I'm out to sea, the sky's turning grey
Everything I do, I do for you
Everything I do comes back to you
I built this boat for two and I choose you

*I can't make you love me if you don't
I love you, goodbye
I'm an empty bottle, you're the note
I'm drifting alone*

It seems like yesterday since you walked away
Everyday is like our first date for the the captain
and her mate
Everything I do, I do for you
Everywhere I go comes back to you
I built this boat for two and I choose you

*I can't make you love me if you don't
I love you, goodbye
I'm an empty bottle, you're the note
I'm drifting alone*

It's not enough, lied to myself, it's what it is
An empty bottle, candlelight, the reason that I live
More than just a memory of something never lived
A kiss that's never kissed

*I can't make you love me if you don't
I love you, goodbye
I'm an empty bottle, you're the note
I'm drifting alone*

12 Fly Me To The Moon (In Other Words)

(Bart Howard)

Aaron Durr: Vocals, Synthesizer
Michael James: Guitars, Keyboards
Rob Hall: Bass
Rob Ahlers: Drums

13 Nothing Lasts Forever (Slight Reprise)

(Michael James Marchesano)

Urban Olsson: Vocals
Michael James: Guitars, 808 Bass,
Reverse Treated Drums
Eric Colvin: String Arrangement

14 Rise Up Into The Light

(Michael James Marchesano, Warren Wellen)

Warren Wellen: Lead Vocals, Acoustic Guitar
Michael James: Electric Guitars, Keyboards,
Choir Vocals
Eric Colvin: String Arrangement, Bass, Keyboards
Urban Olsson: Drums & Percussion
Chris Jansen: Ghost Choir Cello
Randy Seale: Pro Tools

I've lived my life
I've lived it well
Or so I hope
Climbing this hill
View's getting clear
Higher up here
As I rise up into the light

So many questions
So little time
But now the answers
They grow like vines
They climb the wall
Won't let me fall
As I rise up into the light

*Take me to my lover
Promise not to cry
Drop me in the river
Or throw me in the sky
I shall rise up, I shall rise up
I shall rise up into the light*

I've read the good book
I tried my best
Even when I stumbled
Embraced the test
I walked through fire
flames growing higher
As I rise up into the light

*Take me to my lover
Promise not to cry
Drop me in the river
Or throw me in the sky
I shall rise up, I shall rise up
I shall rise up, I shall rise
I shall rise up, I shall rise up
I shall rise up into the light*

Take me to my lover
Promise not to cry
Drop me in the river
Or throw me in the sky

15 You Think It's Over But It's Not

(Eric Colvin, Michael James Marchesano)

Eric Colvin: Orchestral Arrangement, Keyboards
Michael James: Guitar, Reverse Guitar

16 Color Of My Skin

(Michael James Marchesano, Morris LeGrande)

Jason Cropper: Lead & Backing Vocals
Walter Heath: Lead Vocals
Michael James: Electric & Acoustic Guitars, Slide
Guitar, Fretless Bass, Treated Piano, Rhodes, Synth,
Backing Vocals, Drum Programming
Morris LeGrande: Acoustic Guitar, Backing Vocals
Jeremiah Smith a.k.a. TouchTone Da SoundGawd:
Drum Programming, Keyboards
Brett M Grossman: Clavinet, Chains
Urban Olsson: Drums
Linda Taylor: Excellence & Muse
*Remotely & COVID compliantly Produced & Engineered
by Michael James, Brett M Grossman, Urban Olsson,
Aaron Durr, Brian Joseph Kenny, David Kahne, Eric
Colvin, Jeremiah Smith, Jamey Heath, Morris LeGrande,
Jason Cropper, Walter Heath, Linda Taylor. Mixed by
Michael James & Brett M Grossman. Consultation by
Kendrick Dial & Mike Benedetto. Spiritual guidance by
Kenneth H. Williams, Misa Malone, Dean Harvey.*

How come the color of my skin
Gives me a pass when you don't get in?
We're basically the same
Check out our DNA

I'm free to do what I please
You're face down being choked beneath a knee
That's nothing new to me
It's exactly what you see

People killed because they're black
Thoughts and prayers will never bring 'em back
We marched for Civil Rights
Too many of us died

How come they offer me a job
When you can't even go out for a job?
Come with me, let's walk
We really need to talk

*I just want to do some good
But don't know where to start
I'll come to your neighborhood*



*We can have a heart to heart
About the sins built in
To the color of my skin*

How come we in the same band
I get all the money when you holding out your hand?
The double standard rules
They take me for a fool

How can we ever get real
When open wounds never get the chance to heal?
Are you reaching out? - I'll give you
The benefit of the doubt

How come when you protest
"White-splaining" people make everything a mess?
And then I go to sleep
While orphaned parents weep

What kind of garden would we have
If every single flower looked the same?
It's much more interesting
When colors bloom in spring

*I truly want to do some good
But don't know where start
I'll come to your neighborhood
We can have a heart to heart
About the sins built in
To the color of my skin
About the sins built in
To the color of my skin*

I watched them take his life
And now I'm so ashamed
My privilege is white
My denial blood red stained
I'm full of residue
Of old systemic views
But I commit to change
Better yet, I'll be the change

*I truly want to do some good
But don't know where start
I'll come to your neighborhood
We can have a heart to heart
About the sins built in
To the color of my skin*

*About the sins built in
To the color of my skin*

17 Let's Connect Our Minds

(Michael James Marchesano, Luke Lohnes, Eric Colvin)

Eric Colvin: Vocals, Keyboards, Drums

Michael James: Guitars

Brett M Grossman: Bass

If you're born in Jamaica
Or if you're born in America
There's a new kind of soldier
Whose songs are spreading beyond all borders
From the homes in Kingston
To the hills of Hollywood
The music's making a beeline
The tribe will live on forever

*Let's connect - Connect our minds together
Let's connect - Connect our hearts with love
Let's connect - Connect into a movement
Let's connect - Connect our lives with love*

Your drum is made from an oil can
Mine was bought from the second hand
It sounds the same all over
The rhythm spreads like a four leaf clover
From the beach to the night club
People groove to the radio
Catch the vibe that's coming down
From all the villages to your town

*Let's connect - Connect our minds together
Let's connect - Connect our hearts with love
Let's connect - Connect into a movement
Let's connect - Connect our lives with love*

Anytime I think I'm on my own
I reach out to my friends by telephone
We're all in this thing together
Let's connect and change this world right now, forever!

*Let's connect - Connect our minds together
Let's connect - Connect our hearts with love
Let's connect - Connect into a movement
Let's connect - Connect our lives with love*



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"Come Back Lover" and "I'll Be Here" - Vegan Vulcan Music (ASCAP) / Smart Girl Music (BMI)
"I Can't Take It" - Vegan Vulcan Music (ASCAP) / Juletunes Music (ASCAP)
"Color Of My Skin" - Vegan Vulcan Music (ASCAP) / Kaaricor Music (BMI)
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The orchestra tunes their instruments. Concertgoers wait in anticipation for the opening line. Hopes are shattered as a new reality displaces what should otherwise have been a pleasant evening under the stars. Symphonic harmony is replaced by dissonant chaos – **"When the Penny Drops."** I come from a cultured pedigree of old school blues, jazz and classical upbringing – so you can imagine my shock and dismay as the penny dropped far too quickly. Dig the tight coordination between MJ's guitar and Eric Colvin's excellent keys!

By no fault of our own, we are separated from our loved ones. We cannot accept this cruel turn of events. With false alacrity, our narrative seeks to unite us with **"Come Back Lover."** The singsong of a happy cadence masks our deepest fears of being alone. This song is pure comfort food. The slide Dobro solo is gorgeous. If your gig is guitars, you'll love this song. Check out Aaron Durr on vocals, keyboards and yes...drums!

Would you really take a bullet for love? In **"Nothing Lasts Forever,"** a bittersweet acknowledgement is that all good things come to an end. "We're all gonna die; live a little while we can; is this a haiku?" – is this perhaps the ultimate haiku? I love the subtle guitar orchestrations throughout. Being a fan of the classic Mellotron, it's easy to teleport to when I was a kid and couldn't afford one. Immediately after the 2nd

Chorus, listen for the instrumental section that evokes Jazz legend Wes Montgomery on helium – its playful joyous levity would make for a great commercial jingle for an Apple advertisement or a Dating app. Take your pick. Urban Olsson knocks the Haiku right out of the park on vocals!

Pandemics, natural disasters, unexpected fateful turns... **"Learning To Live Without You"** reflects a survivor's anguish over loss. Will those who have moved on remember those left behind? Perhaps forgetting is the ultimate gift. Did I mention I dig the keyboard fills (hint 2nd Verse)? Also, those insanely beautiful orchestral string arrangements – we have Eric Colvin to thank for that. Franc Aledia possesses the perfect voice in conveying the emotion of the lyric. Interesting factoid: Michael composed both this song and "Save Me Tonight" before lunch on the same morning to process the loss of a loved one. Whatever spiked his breakfast Wheaties, sign me up for a dose!

One fateful turn has us **"Scraping the Guard Rail."** No words are required as MJ's guitar recounts a scene better left unspoken. Yet, if you listen closely – perhaps not all is lost. The guardrail has shielded us from finality. Close calls can make us savor life more passionately. This instrumental song is pure magic. We have a new "vocalist" in the form of Michael's melodic lead guitar. Warren Wellen delivers impeccable keys and bass.

Rob Ahlers delivers a heartfelt pounding on the drums while MJ crushes it Robben Ford-esque style on the guitar solo. Love the lead guitar run-in at around the 2-minute mark. Buoyed by the delicate interplay between MJ and Rob, Warren's keyboard solo nimbly navigates its way through nervous waters to the relief of solid ground.

Having survived the wreckage, we aren't out of the woods, yet. **"I Can't Take It"** is an anthem of allusion, a desperate act of condolence – not for the dead, but rather, for the repetitive nature of our fallen angels. Eager to drown our indifference, we gulp (instead of sip) because a part of us refuses to know, refuses to understand each other, let alone ourselves. What's there not to love about Julia Albert's incredible vocal performance? Once again, great guitar layers, not to mention the cool *Dark Side of the Moon* feel. Can't say enough about MJ's guitar tone. We went back and forth on the discussion of subtle delay effects on the guitar. I lobbied hard for a majestic Steve Lukather or David Gilmour tone, but MJ was firm in his resolve to be bold as John Coltrane, closer to nakedness than jeweled. Well, who the hell needs delays when you play that good? He calls me a "Luke head" – and assures me that it is a compliment!

I'm taking inventory. On paper we're fine. In the song, **"Save Me Tonight,"** we aren't alone, but we feel alone. Has the relationship

run its course? Will we choose to live another day? Once again, we have Franc Aledia at the vocal helm. Really love his gritty performance. Check out the musician line-up – all rock stars! Jaben Pennell gives us that incredible Jeff Porcaro-like drum pattern in the verses. MJ delivers yet again – each guitar solo he conjures up is unpredictably refreshing. Eric Colvin's grand piano cries during the main body of the song before passing the baton to MJ, who lays down the highly appropriate austere piano outro that closes this exquisitely crafted song.

What should become clear is the recurring cast of characters that make up the pages of this musical narrative. Our lover is no longer at home, our friends are in faraway places. But, despite the passage of time and distance, **"I'll Be Here"** provides the type of massaging the world desperately craves. Listening to Aaron Durr's vocal is like settling down with the world's best cup of tea! MJ works the fretless bass with sweet tenderness. Drums provide the glue – multi-instrumentalist Eric Colvin delivers in spades! Nothing but smiles on MJ's guitar solo. Wait a second – I thought I heard a little bit of delay effects! How can you not fall in love with the energy, the buildups and great chemistry of this piece? It's a musical hug for the listener who craves the reassurance of a strong, yet gentle, human touch.

When positive measures are exhausted, we look to the horizon, hoping for anything but the cruel hand of irony. **"Push On Through"** speaks of dreams and demons. Is

hope just another lie? Even if it is, it's better to push on through. We change gears and introduce Colin Keenan on vocals, guitars and keyboard. This song is indeed, epic, brilliantly produced, hauntingly sad, yet hopeful. Michael dances the bass passages with ease while creating a beautiful string arrangement. And how about his lead guitar solo at around 2:26? Wow!

What if your sense of **"Something"** isn't at all what you thought it was? Do we live and learn, or are we paralyzed in a state of Déjà vu – at the brink of an epiphany only to realize we are missing "something"? As this haunting song implies, the melody is familiar and taunts and teases us into sublimity. As impactful as George Harrison has been, Michael has taken this song, flipped it on its head and arranged it in such a way as to create a new classic. As such, it stands on its own. Here's a special shout-out to James Zota Baker for his incredible slide guitar accompaniment – listen for it throughout the song. Again, Jaben Pennell on drums does not disappoint. MJ delivers a brief, but powerful performance on vocals during his improvised guitar solo. His legato phrasing on lead guitar harkens the likes of a more visceral, less intellectual, Allan Holdsworth.

"I Can't Make You Love Me" – is it a juxtaposition, an oxymoron or a gift that never gives? It's possible to coexist, yet drift all alone in a sea of uncertainty. Love is never a given. We have the pleasure of Franc Aledia's vocals, once again. The trio of Michael, Warren and Eric play their

instruments with soulful grit, guided by the beacon of Hoobastank drummer Chris Hesse, straight through the darkness, always toward the light.

To play among the stars must be preceded by the ability to launch off of this rock! **"Fly Me to the Moon"** pays homage to the fantasy of escape while in this particular case – paying respects to a famous member of the Rat Pack while faithfully recreating timeless musical passages by way of guitar fills that would make Count Basie blush... with pure joy! MJ's gorgeous vision provides balance to an otherwise bleak planetary episode straight out of the Twilight Zone. It took me a while to wrap my mind around the performance of this classic. But when I did, wow – the training wheels fell off! With giddiness, I'm happy to hear Aaron Durr in the vocal seat. How about MJ's solo rundown at 1:35? Dude! What was that bit of jazzified magic?

We are conditioned to believe that **"Nothing Lasts Forever (Slight Reprise)"** – and that may be true during that sliver of time awarded us here on earth. An apparition of Urban Olsson returns to contemplate his mortality and that of his loved ones.

In the end we've lived our life and lived it well. **"Rise Up Into the Light"** is a story of redemption—our hero is at peace with the impending inescapable transition, and assures those left behind that they should celebrate instead of cry. Our hearts break as we say our

goodbyes. Time waits for no one. Not only does Warren Wellen play keys on "Rise Up"—he also takes co-composing credit, plays the acoustic guitar and slugs a walk-off home run with a stunning heartfelt vocal performance! MJ's tremolo Telecaster accompaniment is the protagonist's loyal wingman to the very end, evolving from confidant to death doula. Urban Olsson provides a great brush shuffle on drums. Eric Colvin's string arrangement is fabulous. Hit the pause button when you reach the ghostly coda – that's 26 tracks of Michael James singing layered choir vocals! Great vision and amazing closure that makes my eyes water every time.

Just when **"You Think it's Over, But it's Not,"** alas, life as we know it becomes a distant memory—and hopefully a new beginning. This composition (as short as it is) could not have been handled with greater care. After all, it serves as that transition where the soul takes flight into the light. Eric Colvin and Michael James team up to provide a landscape befitting of the occasion. MJ revisits guitar lead fills from When The Penny Drops – in reverse! We're moving forward on our cosmic journey while simultaneously going back in time. Figure that one out.

Speaking of time, let us awaken to 1863 when Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, when field songs were the email of the plantation. Then, let us just as swiftly time travel into the futuristic year, 2020, when tear gas canisters and bloody batons add chaos to peaceful gatherings protesting

400 years of human and civil rights inequality. To the one who uttered 'hindsight is 20/20' -- sadly history has tried to teach us, but the students have all skipped class. **"Color of My Skin"** reminds us we have so much to learn in so little time. Weezer co-founder Jason Cropper makes his vocal entrance along with '70s Soul singer Walter Heath and co-composer, Jazz master Morris LeGrande. This song is the result of some serious soul searching. MJ coordinates this diverse gathering of heavy-hitting talent, allowing all four stars to shine brightly, harmoniously, while body-slammng racism head on, with no excuses. There is beauty in diversity, and we are stronger when we work together. 2020 wasn't just about a pandemic, but much more, including yet another racial awakening. Hopefully the awareness will stick this time, and not become lost in the never-ending parade of revolving news cycle sound bites.

And so we conclude this journey where we began. Just as the symphonic poem propels us from movement to movement, so does the storyline of this musical collection that makes up the larger body of work, *Shelter In Place*. Perhaps what follows the tuning of orchestral instruments is indeed, not a disruption, but rather, the unfolding of the human struggle. Tests and difficulties strengthen us and facilitate the acquisition of virtues. Like steel that must endure fire and the pounding of the blacksmith's hammer, we must endure trials and tribulations to become tempered swords ready for the battlefield, to become warriors

for justice, peace, compassion and love. **"Let's Connect Our Minds"** serves to convert these struggles to life-sustaining connection – to one another. To get back in tune with each other. Pure icing on the cake, this song is! Ok, let me stop right here and gush over the arrangement, the keyboard stabs, the articulated reggae guitar and notably - check out Eric Colvin featured on vocals. Brett M. Grossman on bass rounds out the ensemble. The guys play with Steely Dan-like precision. What a great celebration of musicianship! Michael and Eric provide coordinated, parallel melodic phrasing and Michael throws down a gorgeous lead guitar solo in the right place and the right time. Life is a celebration. Live it well! ■

Gratitude:

I, Michael James, being of sound mind and body, profoundly thank everybody who participated in the making of this album. It takes a village. If your names were already listed above, they are most likely not listed here—but you should know that I asked you to join me in this endeavor because I love you. You already know that, so I will spare the reader the reasons why. Special thanks to Colin Keenan, Warren Wellen, Keith Milutinovic, Kelly Bowen, Cynthia Catania, Rob Chiarelli, Linda Taylor, Julia Albert Olsson for always being there when I need fresh perspective. Heartfelt thanks to Marek Stycos (Dangerous Music and Audio Alchemist), EveAnna Manley (Manley Labs), Jim Aschow & Doug West (Mesa/Boogie), Bob Muller, Tom Anderson (Tom Anderson Guitarworks), Ken Bogdanowicz (SoundToys), Jason Davies (Eleven Dimensions Media, Zynaptiq, PSI Audio), Robin Ashley (Phoenix Audio), Simon Cote, Paul J de Benedictis (Focal Professional and Spectrasonics), Gil Griffith (Wave Distribution), Paul Wolff (Fix Audio), Ray Maxwell (Eventide), Robert Bradshaw (Custom Audio Electronics), Paul Erlandson, Freddy Villano & Rebecca Ehardt (Glyph Technologies), Dan Pilver (iZotope), Roger Robindore (Apogee Digital), Carmen Rizzo (Native Instruments), Russ Hughes (LiquidSonics), Wade Goeke (Chandler Limited), Ken Rich (Ken Rich Services), Geoff Luttrell (San Francisco Guitarworks), Stirling Trayle, Barry Grzebek, George Alessandro (Alessandro High-End Products), Tim Pfouts (SIT Strings), Roger Roschnik (PSI Audio), Matthew Chamberlain (Peregrine Insurance Agency) and Allen Farst (Niche Productions) for your support, attention to detail and friendship. Collyer Spreen, your talents and generosity are boundless. Bonus points to Chris Jansen, Christina Joy, and Jeremy Sutherland for the extra innings walk-off home run.

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