

EVERYBODY'S BEGGING

Rabbi Shammai was known for the strictness of his views. The Talmud tells that a gentile came to Shammai saying that he would convert to Judaism if Shammai could teach him the whole Torah in the time that he could stand on one foot. Shammai drove the impertinent gentile away with a stick. Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, converted the gentile by telling him, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. Now go and study it."

To follow our 2013 release *Stories of Ghosts* (dialogues around themes from the Old Testament from an unbelievers perspective) we decided to make a record in the Talmudic manner, an album of commentary on existing songs & other works of art. People generally crib from other people's work but we wanted to make the influences explicit, to think about their themes, to think about the differences. The commentary is sometimes lyrical, sometimes musical, sometimes it's both and sometimes it's commentary upon commentary.

So hopefully we've done nothing hateful to our illustrious neighbours but just peeked over their back fences to get a glimpse of their genius - this is what we saw...

Track 01 EVERYBODY'S BEGGING

"Banquet" is Joni Mitchell's observations about opportunity and the unequal distribution of resources in a bountiful society,

*"..some get the gristle
Some get the marrow bone
And some get nothing
Though there's plenty to spare"*

It got us to thinking that whether you get all or whether you get none there still lies within everybody a deep unquenchable need. It is an incontrovertible fact that human beings are ever questing for more, spiritual, material, experiential, it goes against our DNA to sit and be content with the way things are. Consequently if we are not traversing mountains (literal or metaphorical) just to survive, then we tend to manufacture mountains with varying degrees of failure and success.

"Everybody's Begging" is an



exploration of that notion, the deep, deep well of unsatisfied longing that sits at the centre of the human condition. No matter what we have we always want a little more, no matter what comfort & happiness is ours we are still always agitating. More love, more G-d, more money, more stuff, it's the itch that can't be scratched. Everybody's begging, it's the urgent, insistent nature of the beast.

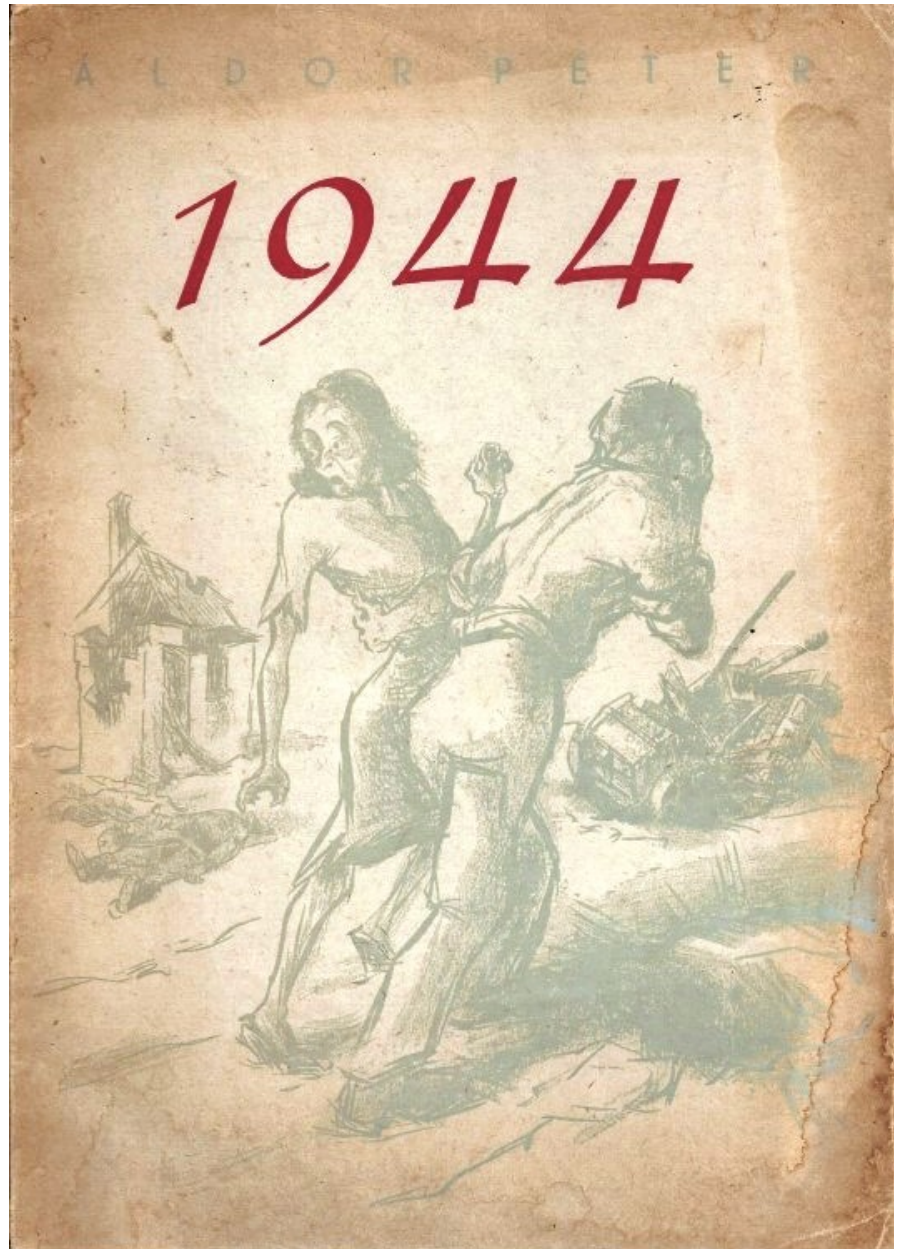
In a more mundane sense Everybody's Begging has a 21st century touchstone as well, the disappearance of jobs under the digital revolution we are living through, the music business being one of the first to be irrevocably altered where we see musicians literally begging for money to get their recordings made. Some days it feels like the collusion of our natures and our environment is to ensure that begging is what we are all being groomed for.

Track 02 THROUGH YOUR BLOOD SHALL YOU LIVE

"When I First Met Your Ma" is a sweet story, some lives are blessed & some beginnings are simple & charming even if the end is tinged with wistfulness for what might have been. Paul Kelly's song is possibly autobiographical but is definitely capturing what must be for many the kind of love story that happens in a blessed place. "Love like a bird flies away" a line that modestly hints at the heartache within it. In another place at a different time "**Through Your Blood Shall You Live**" tells the autobiographical story of the start of a many decades long love affair with a gruelling beginning, two people thrown together in fear & confusion where potential eradication had the intensifying effect of making love and identity far too weighty to fly away. Through Your Blood Shall You Live is When I First Met Your Ma but in the crucible of polar opposite circumstances & very different results emerge.

The line, *through your blood shall you live*, is from a prayer book called the Haggadah which is read every year on the Jewish festival of Passover and tells the story of the Exodus. It is repeated twice to drive the point home and always prompts a family discussion to pick apart the depth of meaning contained in that poetry. We present here an interpretation which points to genetic survival as a way through the trials and tribulations of history. There is a backing vocal nod at the end of the song to the Rolling Stone's "**Sympathy For the Devil**";

we like to think that at a time when the Devil was rampaging around Europe our song tells a story (one of many stories big & small) of a human victory snatched from his maw.



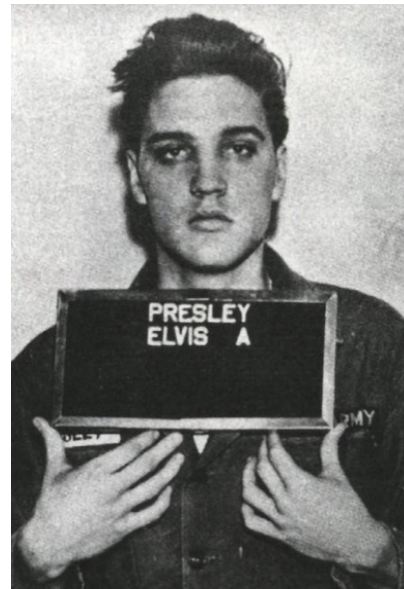
Track 03 BLESSED

Leonard Cohen's "**Hallelujah**" is a meditation around the Biblical King David; religious ecstasy through orgasm; the spiritual power & mystery of music; the unfathomable puzzle in the intertwining of the Earthly & the Heavenly.

King David had a son who was also a King. Solomon was reputedly the anonymous author of Ecclesiastes, an enormously influential work on the Western canon and also the writer of Song of Songs a celebration of sexual love. With his creative powers and voracious appetites surely King Solomon should have had some featured moment in Hallelujah. And it poses the question, were the songs to get closer to G-d or closer to the pleasures of the flesh?

Many thousands of years on & plenty of rock stars are still grappling with the same ideas, the closer they get to the Divine the more the pleasures of the flesh are available to them, a classic rock 'n roll trope - & can they tell the difference? "**Blessed**" wonders about this heir to King David, but maybe it wonders about Cohen too. At the end of our limited time, what is left - the love we make or the works we leave behind?

Musically in "**Blessed**" there is no "fourth, the fifth, the minor chord and the major lift" but if you were to take a piece of graph paper & chart the contours of "**Hallelujah**", the music's internal breathing, you would find a certain similarity with the breath within "**Blessed**".



Track 04 WE WALK THE WIRE



In **“Go Down Moses”** Louis Armstrong sings about G-d telling Moses to go to Pharaoh & asking him to *“Let my people go”*. The song doesn’t elaborate any further on the Exodus story and when it was written (way before Armstrong recorded it) African Americans were still in bondage, there was no resolution to their real plight. Times change but our song **“We Walk the Wire”** suggests that nothing changes & asks what if the slaves have nowhere to go, what if there is nothing to do to appease the masters? History has reached that point many times & even when people don’t appear to be in bondage they still have to walk carefully.

We can hear a musical through line from the chorus of our song to Sia’s **“Chandelier”** a song of self inflicted bondage.

Track 05 KOL NIDRE

Kol Nidre is a prayer chanted three times before the sun sets on the eve of Yom Kippur the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. It is an annulment of vows & of contracts to false gods, an entreaty to be allowed to clear the slate & start again. In life we pray to all sorts of highly seductive false gods. The Kol Nidre prayer has inspired many composers who recognised that the contrast of the formality of a contract annulled with a plea to G-d to release a sinner from

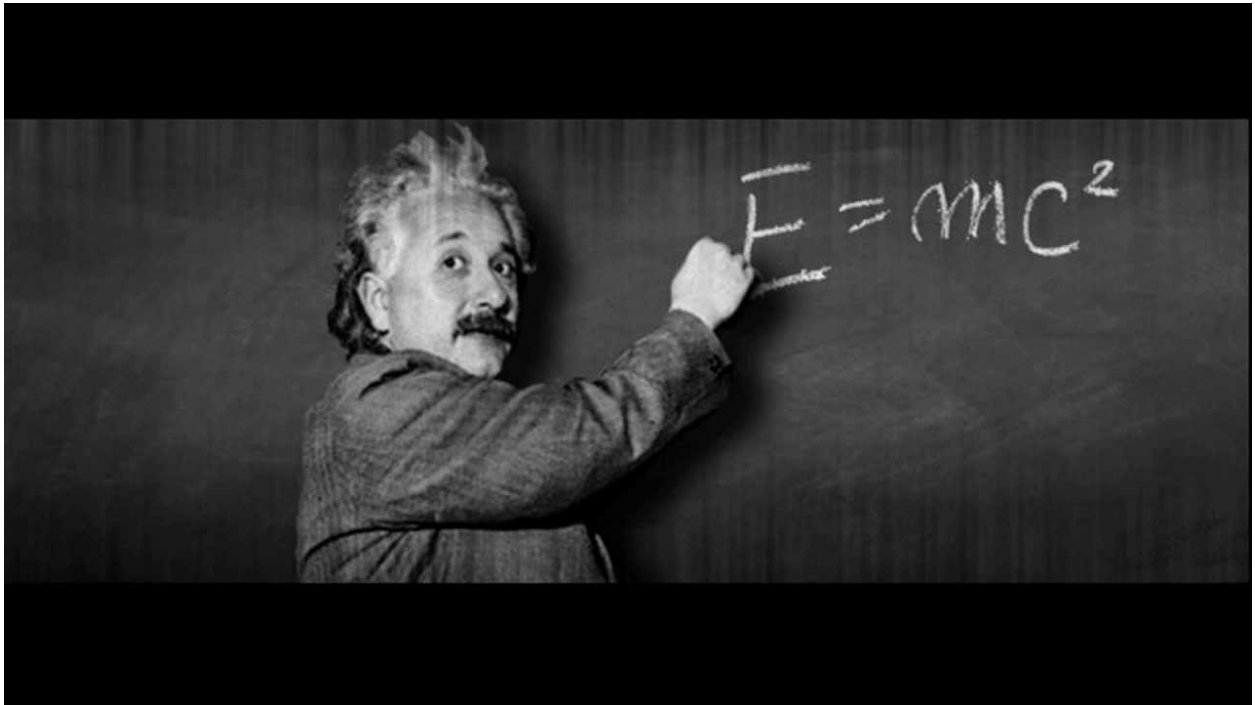


their sins is breathtaking and beautifully human. The celebrated New York composer John Zorn wrote a meditative instrumental piece based on Kol Nidre & we have tried to put some of that feeling in ours.

This song is a sinner singing the prayer, slowly, repetitively as if the very act will provide release.

Track 06 AS SWEET AS BATTLES WON

The world is divided. People living in the West feel increasingly detached from History, from Religion, from Politics & ultimately from Meaning. The Talking Heads song **“Once In A Lifetime”** is the cry of a man who has lived his life without feeling any deep connection to it, a man who suddenly realises he has played a bit character at best, the classic outsider who feels powerless to alter the events that spin out of control right in front of his eyes. The singer (David Byrne) is the preacher, drumming home the desolate nature of the human spirit without a belief in something



greater but the song also wonders if in that blankness a sort of religious ecstasy can be found. Fuck that, the other half of the world finds deep solace in religion & in history, our life is connected to a life thousands of years ago, the tribulations of our ancestors are with us now, right now. **"As Sweet As Battles Won"** is the battle cry of an oppressed people for all of history, the role of narrator/observer is played by G-d alternating with the Jew as slave, as concentration camp survivor, as physicist, as soldier, as mother. It is a history of attachment; is it happier, not necessarily, but it is life in close-up, fully connected. Is that ecstasy?

Track 07 LIFE'S A CURSE

"Red Right Hand" Nick Cave's updating of Robert Johnson's **"Crossroads"** is a meeting with the Devil but with no conclusive idea of what you're going to get in return other than the expected misery and grief that such a deal entails.



Rather than a depiction of the bargain it's a moody noir piece of the devil being in the detail & the setting within this song. It made us think what if the Devil was literally in the detail, within the fabric of the road itself?

"Life's A Curse" is a musician's lament of life on the road, a particular tour we took in Outback Queensland where the road was interminably straight & featureless, the heat on the black tarmac unbearable, the surrounding scrub burnt from the relentless sun, the pitch an endless procession of road kill, flattened, bloodied & charred, swarming with carrion crows trying to pick the bones clean & avoid becoming road kill themselves. The road was the Devil with no deal in sight winding further & further into a sad heat stroked Hades.

Listen to the red right hand plucking the bass while looking at a Hieronymus Bosch painting & don't forget to stoke the fire.

Track 08 THIS SONG HAS GOT ME

Gillian Welch's **"One Little Song"** has the refrain:

*"There's gotta be a song left to sing
'Cause everybody can't have thought of everything
One little song that ain't been sung
One little rag that ain't been wrung out completely yet
Just gotta a little left"*

The songwriter's (the writer's!) dilemma, how to fill the blank page with something meaningful & worthwhile. One Little Song talks about small details as (maybe) being worthwhile subjects but keeps asking the question should she do it because it's probably already been done - everybody's begging. Our song **"This Song Has Got Me"** takes the big details, it imagines a life in song, the reasons for doing it, a career, the needs, the success, as well as the eternal frustration. Hopefully there is at least one song left to sing.

Welch's lyric focuses on the very intimate relationship between writer and writing but This Song Has Got Me takes it further to examine the relationship between writer & audience & ask what do they know of each other? How shielded are writers from their encounters with listeners. What is good to know & what is too much? Is the mystery a protection for those standing on both sides of the art?

This Song Has Got Me

Conway/Zygier

Part 1

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Track 09 THROW ME A LIFELINE

“Five Years” is David Bowie’s nightmarish vision of the end of the world; like the best (or worst) nightmares, it feels real “we’ve got five years” before it’s all over - whatever that means. It is the combination of that uncompromising real number superimposed on the unreal prediction of the end of the world that is so crushing. **“Throw Me A Lifeline”** is



another kind of nightmare, it is every bad thing that can happen and the feeling of powerlessness to do anything about it. It is the feeling of having to reach deep within your own psyche and call on a reservoir of strength that you possibly didn't know was there until you were pushed to the very edge. The inner reserve of strength that humans can call on, adrenalin, survival instinct, is within us all. Five Years accepts the fate of the world as unavoidable, Throw Me A Lifeline demands a different outcome.

Track 10 SERPENT'S TOOTH

I remember studying Shakespeare's "**King Lear**" but being a schoolgirl I never fully comprehended the tragedy of the betrayal of a parent by his children. Lear chooses to be seduced by the excessive, false flattery of his two eldest daughters rather than the less eloquent but sincere affirmations of love from his youngest daughter all of which ends rather badly, in fact by curtain close everyone is dead. No one dies in our song "**Serpent's Tooth**" but all these decades later and now as a parent of 3 daughters, that magnificent quote "how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child" rings bells of recognition and deepest empathy that at my first encounter I didn't feel. Becoming a parent was a kind of alchemy for my deepest being, it exposed the tenderest layers of feeling I had no idea I could have, the deep wells of worry and the tidal waves of love that have no equal; I went from fortress to cupcake and of course on the same continuum, a lion if they were in any kind of danger. And then comes the teenage years. Lear's daughters are most likely teenagers, it is certainly a portrait of the kind of carnality that chimes with the teenage experience. Cruel, vain, seeking to stamp their authority by not just stepping out of the nest but kicking it out of the tree, what parent of teenagers hasn't been at the end of a sharp tongue, suffering under a torrent of abuse or enduring days or more of stoney silence. It's perplexing and of course the hurt is so much more intense when the stranger before you is your own flesh & blood. King Lear is excessive in its body count but Shakespeare is dealing in the rawest of human relationships and maybe only a pile of corpses can attest to how sharp that pain is. So in view of my changed circumstance, I felt compelled to revisit this great work of art in a modern context - I present you my shattered emotional corpse.

