

JOE REILLY

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“Planting Gardens chronicles Reilly’s journey across the Great Lakes state. Its songs were written on the banks of the Detroit River, in the hills of the Huron watershed and on the shores of Lake Michigan. Reilly...seamlessly combines the regional folk of Sufjan Stevens with the quirky humor of Barenaked Ladies and the multicultural activism of Ozomatli.”

~Real Detroit Weekly

Planting Gardens was released in 2006 by singer songwriter and activist Joe Reilly. The result of a three-year process of songwriting, musical collaborations, and spiritual activism, this album offers listeners a hopeful vision of peace, non-violence, and love within the context of community building. In times when positive messages are difficult to find in the media, Reilly waters seeds of compassion and understanding with poetic lyrics, beautiful melodies, and soulful rhythms.

Planting Gardens gives us a tour of Joe’s experiences and reflections of life in Detroit and Chicago and of the earth and waters in between.

"City oh city I sing to your soul. Let the babies and seedlings be free and grow. Before you replace them with buildings and roads. Remember the sunlight and flowers who grow." ~Follow the Sun

Cultivating soils of our consciousness with messages of environmental justice and stewardship, Joe’s songs appeal to all who seek a deeper connection with themselves, with each other, and with the earth.

"Maybe I should be a little more like the river, flowing slowly, into the sea." ~The River

Throughout his travels of natural, urban, and spiritual worlds, Joe never loses sight of his origins.

"Michigan is the state where the lakes are great and the water is fresh so you can hydrate." ~The Michigan Song

Backed by his Chicago-based band The Faith Project, Reilly recorded the album with Kalamazoo engineers Ian Gorman and John Campos at the Leaven Center, a retreat and study center nurturing the relationship between spirituality and social justice in Lyons, Michigan. The spiritual activism supported by the Leaven Center as well as the beauty and serenity of its land provided the perfect conditions for the germination of this creative project. A ten-minute enhanced video portion of the album documents this creative process and includes interviews and scenes of the Leaven Center recording sessions.

The Faith Project consists of jazz drummer Jon Faro, soul gospel bassist Alejandro Cornejo, Haitian Master Percussionist Camelo Romelus and special guest vocalist, Chicago’s Native soul diva Michaela Marchi. Their multicultural musical chemistry transcends barriers of race, class, and religion to create a solid foundation of world rhythm behind Joe’s powerful voice. This effect is accentuated by several special guests to the album such as Native American Music Award winners Keith Secola (Akina Music) and Annie Humphrey (Makoche Records), folk singer Sue Demel (Sons of the Never Wrong, Gadfly Records), and members of the Long Hairz Collective.

Complementing the music are three excerpts from a talk by Vietnamese Zen Master, author, and teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, given during a retreat for entertainers at the Deer Park Monastery in California.

On the song Detroit Summer, inspired by Joe’s involvement with the grassroots movement in the Motor City founded by Grace Lee Boggs, Reilly and The Faith Project are joined by Detroit’s own St. Leo Choir.

Background

Joe Reilly has been a singer, songwriter, and guitarist for over twelve years and has had extensive performance and touring experience, bringing messages of hope and peace in his songs to audiences in the Midwest and across the United States. Both of his parents are singers and guitarists and Joe grew up

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listening to their classical and liturgical music in his home and church, learning that music can be prayerful, healing, and celebratory. With their help he began to teach himself to play guitar and sing. In addition to self-instruction he has also studied voice and guitar privately and at the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago. Joe is Italian, Irish, and Native American (Cherokee). His background in the study and performance of many different musical styles, including Native American music, folk, blues, jazz, liturgical, and classical, as well as his academic studies of environmental justice and racism and spiritual roots in Catholicism, Buddhism, and Native American religions has led to a writing style that incorporates these diverse influences into a unique and powerful voice.

The Message

The result is a creative and honest voice that calls for a holistic healing of our society for the benefit of all beings and future generations. Joe has written, arranged, recorded, and published over 30 songs on three albums and has worked to build a career that supports the sharing of his music with a diversity of listeners through recording, community-based performances, educational and instructional workshops, and tours. In 2005 Joe received a Community Arts Assistance Program Grant award from the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. He used this award to teach singing, guitar, and songwriting to Native American and homeless youth in Chicago, producing a CD of youth songs titled "Finding Our Own Voice." It is through the active sharing of his music that he hopes to inspire and empower people to heal their relationships to themselves, each other, and the earth.

Experience

Joe has performed at festivals such as the Concert of Colors (Detroit 2004), venues such as Schubas (Chicago 2003, 2004), the Chicago Cultural Center (Chicago 2005) and Uncommon Ground (Chicago, 2002-05), tours such as "How Far is Home?" (Minnesota 2002-04), and talent contests such as Amateur Night at the Apollo (Detroit 2003). In addition to public performances, Joe uses his music as an educational tool in classrooms and after school programs with at-risk youth such as Project Paradigm (Detroit 2003), Teen Living Program (Chicago 2005), the American Indian Center of Chicago (2003-05) and for adults with disabilities at Esperanza Community Services (Chicago 2004).

Recordings

Joe has included his music in many different ensembles and has collaborated with dozens of other artists to create group recordings and performances. From 1997-2001 Joe was a singer with a Native American drum group called Treetown and performed at many Pow-Wows and Native American gatherings. In 2001 he made his first recording as a solo artist, arranging a diverse group of musicians and singers as accompanists with him on nine original songs. In 2001 Joe co-founded the Long Hairz Collective, a trio including Joe, poet Brian Babb, and emcee William Copeland. Combining styles of hip-hop, folk, blues, and spoken word in their songs, the Long Hairz Collective recorded a CD in 2002 and continue to perform and successfully distribute their CD. Over the past year Joe has spent much of his time coordinating the Faith Project, an extremely talented band in Chicago that includes Joe as its founder, jazz drummer Jon Faro, soul bassist Alejandro Cornejo, and Haitian master percussionist Camelo Romelus. Joe has returned to Michigan (Ann Arbor) and has just released his next album, Planting Gardens, featuring the Faith Project.

Artist's Statement

"I create music for the benefit of all beings, empowering listeners to become actively engaged in their communities and raising their consciousness with messages of social and environmental justice. Understanding music as an expression of spirit, I write, sing, and perform in order to celebrate life and allow God, my ancestors, and love to sing through me. My music invites listeners to join in this celebration. I have inherited music as a gift and actively nurture its development through study, practice, performance, and life experience. I humbly offer these songs from my heart to the world like a gentle spring thunder shower, watering seeds of compassion, hope, love, understanding, healing, courage, laughter, freedom, clarity, and reconciliation in the hearts of those who choose to listen. I am grateful for all who have watered those seeds within me and who have encouraged me to take risks and share my gifts in open and honest ways."