

Mp3 Zachary Scot Johnson - To Whom It May Concern



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Singer/ songwriter that blends acoustic folk, pop, blues, alt country and jazz. 15 MP3 Songs FOLK:

Modern Folk, POP: Folky Pop Show all album songs: To Whom It May Concern Songs Details:

Singer-songwriter Zachary Scot Johnson captivates listeners with the lush emotional landscape of his acoustic fusion music. He blends blues and folk, alt-country and pop, and rock-n-roll, creating his signature sound, a distinctive musical flavor unlike any other. Yet it is absolutely accessible and connects with the heartstrings we all have inside us, waiting to be touched. But theres nothing cloying or artificial here, only genuine emotions, real impact, heart-on-sleeve emotional honesty all driven by remarkable talent. Not an ounce of Johnsons spirit escapes being funneled into his music. He holds himself to high standards. He has recognized in the world of music that the greats are all those who felt music with every fiber of their being and paid music back by putting every part of themselves into the creation of more music. "People whose entire body and being go into a performance inspire me," he says. "People who have the guts to go out there every night and lay it all out there for the audience to take they influence me." For his second cd, 'To Whom It May Concern', Zachary Scot Johnson had a mission--fill the sound. His stark, minimalist debut, 2004's 'Moment of Clarity' was recorded in the period of two long, intense days. The sessions resulted in the acclaimed 78+ minute disc and 6 additional songs not used (for obvious time restrictions). This time around, he says, "we focused on quality over quantity and have made the record I wanted to make". He recorded the new song set over the course of a full year, refusing to commit to deadlines or rush the process along. "There have been about 15 different release dates given during this one and as each of them came and went, I found myself tweaking and altering these songs. There are certainly pros and cons to having that kind of luxury--it can make a procrastinator out of anyone--but I relished the opportunity to do it my way", he says. Turning in a record that is far more rich

and textured than his debut pushed his new songs in a special way. "It's been almost four years since my last record, so I've been playing quite a few of these songs for a while now at shows and have gotten comfortable and familiar with them in their solo, acoustic arrangements. Filling them out with bass, drums, guitars, pianos, and everything else was really nice--some of these songs sound completely different on the cd than when I perform them live." Some of these songs ('I've Been Here', 'Rewind', 'One Good Reason Why' and 'Life With You' in particular) have developed into set list staples. After the release of his first cd, Johnson, who was still a college student at the time, found himself balancing touring and writing with classes as well as countless musical and theatrical performances. Graduating in 2005 as a triple-major from Lawrence University in Music Performance, Theater Arts and Psychology, he has since managed to stay busy in both music and theater. He spent the fall of 2006 in his first national tour with a theatrical show. "It's the life I need--to be able to do both. I couldn't do one and not the other. I'm ok with taking a few months off of going out on the road for the sake of doing a good play and I'm also able at times to take breaks from theater to concentrate on music and touring. As long as I have a bit of balance, that's all I need". Having performed in over 50 theatrical shows, Johnson has a difficult time choosing favorites. They're all special for a different reason. Some are important because of the character or the play itself. Some bring about great friendships, relationships. I'm picky about what I do, so it has to strike a chord somewhere. Asked about his writing process, Johnson reveals he is not a strict writer in any sense. "When I first started writing music I did the absolute worst thing a writer can do--I forced it. I forced myself to write two songs a day for about six months. And all of it was redundant, trite. Of course, I was about sixteen at the time, so that may have been part of it, too," he says. "But now I find myself going through spurts. I'll write six good songs over the course of two weeks then won't write much of anything for months. And at this point in my life I'm really trying to stretch the content of my writing beyond the broken relationship songs. I write a lot of political and social stuff, too." When asked about the often dark and revealing nature of his writing, he laughs and nods. "I get asked this all the time. I know a lot of the stuff I write is a bit dark or sad. But the people I listen to--Shawn Colvin, Lucinda, Patty Griffin, Joni, Emmylou--most of them never write happy stuff, either. What's interesting about a happy song? Not much. You know, when you're happy, the last thing you want to do is write a song about it! You're having too much fun to write about it. When you're feeling something else, that's when the pen and paper become the appropriate outlet, at least for me. And as far as the personal nature, I don't know. I don't

think it's too personal, I hope not. I sometimes feel like I'm not as open to that as someone like Joni or Lori McKenna or Patti Scialfa are. Those are really the people that I admire, the ones who have the guts to put everything out there. When life is chaotic, I get a song out of everything. I don't necessarily seek out chaos, but it certainly helps my writing." Johnson recorded the 13 original songs that make up 'To Whom It May Concern' almost entirely himself. Singing and playing piano, guitars, mandolin, violin, banjo, drums, percussion and harmonicas himself, he recruited his two brothers, Joel and Nathan whom are both strong musicians with solo works, to participate and asked Megan Flod and Mark Paffrath to contribute harmony vocals. 'Rewind' begins the album. One of the most popular songs in Johnson's set, the new version included here is stunning. Over a funk groove and some striking electric guitar distortion, Johnson sings a tale of an older character looking back upon his life. 'I've Been Here', the oldest of these songs, is an early album gem. Other highlights include the country-tinged "One Good Reason Why" which has everyone around him saying it's the finest tune he's written yet, which features Flod and Paffrath singing backup. Changing it up to something more funky, he sparkles on the blues piano on "These Days". There's crisp mandolin on "Now I Know" that gives the song a folky feel. "Down This Road" has a catchy groove behind perhaps the most intense lyrics Johnson has put on his albums. The song, seemingly about an intense love affair was inspired by the play that Johnson wrote in the spring of 05. That song was supposed to be the theme song, so to speak, for the play that I wrote. The play was about an affair, so that's what the song is about. It's not about my life in any way. The political song The World Is Burning Down was written after the California wildfires of fall 2007 began and calls out political figures like George W. Bush and the current governor of California. "Don't Regret" turns in a funky and fresh organ solo at its end and "Life With You" is sparse and moving--with a voice and guitar combo and only mandolin for decoration. Then there's the title track, an all-out, infectious blues tune that wails between its leaving-your-lover lyrics and extended solos. "Dreams", which Johnson has stated is based around a recurring childhood nightmare, sounds as much like a tentative love song as it does about scarier circumstances, with haunting backup from Flod. "I Was Thinking" sounds like early Joni Mitchell with its haunting guitar transitions and bare instrumentation. Sour, with a string quartet on it, brings the album to a beautiful close. That song was written and recorded so late in the process it just barely made it on the record. I'd always liked that word and thought it would make a good song title. I have a thing with words that I think sound good, I don't know. I went to dinner with a friend that was having a hard time in her

relationship, so we were talking it out and I felt the song beginning to form. I wrote it in between scenes at a theater rehearsal that evening, and recorded it at about midnight that same night and never touched it again. Which is why my voice sounds so tired on that track! But it seemed like a good closer to the album and I'm especially proud of that one. Also included on the cd as bonus tracks are live versions of Rewind and One Good Reason Why, recorded at Shank Hall during the fall of 2006. Since the release of "Moment of Clarity", Johnson has spent as much time opening for nationally touring artists as he has headlining. Among the most acclaimed that he's opened for, he cites The Be Good Tanyas, Steve Forbert and Jane Siberry. But it was the first artist that he opened for that meant the most. "I got to open for Shawn Colvin, which was to me, the most meaningful push I could have had. Shawn is the reason I became a songwriter in the first place. And whenever I find myself frustrated by this business, everything that it takes...all I have to do is listen to Shawn and all is well". Asked what it was like performing for his hero he says, simply, "She's such a wonderful person, it was great. I loved playing the big venue and all of that, but really what I take from that experience is the realization that sometimes a hero can be even more wonderful and generous and amazing than you hoped and thought they could be. We had the best time that night, it surpassed my hopes in every way. Whether he's opening or headlining, he wins fans over at every appearance with his incredible live shows. He's been known to keep an audience captivated for 3 or even 4 hour no-break sets. "I've always disliked taking an intermission. Don't know why, but I feel like it has the potential to kill the momentum," he says. Johnson is aware that with a far-widening fan base, his music is being enjoyed by hundreds every day all over the world. He says he's going to keep recording without a break for his third record, stating the nearly four-year gap between albums was "far too long". He also notes that he has an ever-growing backlog of songs ready to record. I have enough songs already written to do another several albums and I'm writing more all the time. I have to catch up on the recording end, but I keep getting distracted by my own life. With more time on the concert stage for this record, he will have the chance to get up close and personal with fans, which is "the best part of my job. Those couple hours playing are the best part of my day".

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