

*Just A Spark, On Journey From The Dark*



# JONATHAN RICHMAN

Jonathan Richman's series of recorded musical episodes as broadcast on Bandcamp. This is his illustrated and written companion to the first six episodes – September 1st through November 15th, 2020.

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Hi. The idea of this series of music episodes is to get my latest songs out to anyone who'd want to hear them and to entertain people in general.

The first episode gives the theme song of the series: "Just A Spark On Journey From The Dark." Also has a new song idea of mine; "No One On This Earth Gets Me Like She Does." And the guitar instrumental "Maybe A Walk Home From Natick High School," so named because I think the sound of it suggests a walk.

"Want to Visit My Inner House?" is the title of episode 2. The original poem, written, (or more likely just sung and written down later by other people in his community) some time in the last several hundred years, by Padmalochan, is titled, in the translation that I have for it from the Bengali, goes like this;

Want To Visit My Inner Home?  
Lovers march there and sing of love,  
Then walk the way to it,  
And leave behind lust and all  
The ways of the world.

Blame and violence, old age and death,  
Dawn and dust won't be there;  
Only rays of color.

Aside from the song I make up based on that poem, the episode has "La Festa Qua," a song in Italian about a house party; also, an idea for the song "A Penchant For The Stagnant," which occurred to me after we recorded it for the album "Sa," a year or so back, Yoganada's song "I Am The Sky," and my take on Sherman Kelly's "Dancing In The Moonlight," which I sing lots of times when we play at shows.

Episode 3 celebrates a visit from my drummer, Tommy Larkins, to our recording session in October. I keep making up verses to "That Summer Feeling," so we recorded some of the newer ones for this episode. Also on this one is the instrumental: "Egyptian Reggae," which was a big disco hit in Europe in 1977. Also, we have a short "This World Is One Sad World." Yup, pretty short. And the Salvatore Di Giacomo poem of the turn of the last century, "Pianneforte e Notte," or "Piano Of The Night." DiGiacomo, one of the most celebrated poets of Naples in the past two hundred years, lived from 1830 to 1936. In this poem, the poet hears the music of a piano off in the distance, from his alley in his neighborhood, late at night.

O.K. Episode 4 has my version of a poem about silence by Rumi, who made his poems in the language of Farsi, eight centuries ago. I'm singing in French but the translation I read it in was in English. Go figure.

Oh, by the way, if you read poetry of Rumi in translation, or for that matter, the poetry of ANYONE in translation, see if you can't get hold of several different translators' versions of any given poem. You'll see they vary wildly, sometimes panoramically, and sometimes some of them are just plain incorrect. You gotta check.

Also on episode 4 is another look at "Springtime In New York" and "When Harpo Played His Harp." We record this stuff at a little studio in downtown Chico, California. Since there has been an epidemic that perhaps you've heard about, we recorded a lot of this stuff outdoors.

Episode 5, "Cold Pizza," has Jake Sprecher and Marty Parker singing back-up. Yes! In addition to the song "Cold Pizza," this one has "I Found A Love That Opens That Door For Me," and "New Kind Of Neighborhood," which is a song I made up quite some time ago.

Episode 6 has a lot about Boston, where I'm from. I grew up 17 miles out into the suburbs, in the town of Natick.

The song "Bajo La Tierra En El Subsuelo" (or translated to "On The Earth's Subfloor"), is about voyaging under the earth - in your astral body, of course. I got the idea from a book published in Mexico City in 1952 which I found by chance in a bookstore in Grass Valley, California. The bookstore had only four books in Spanish and this was one of them. I liked the cover.

"As We Walk Towards Fenway Park In Boston Town" and "The Fenway" show where my mind was the night we recorded Episode 6. Also we have "My Partner In Crime" and "I Love This Sad World" and we close with "Nishi," a song I found in a book of children's songs in the Boston Public Library in Copley Square. This short song is thought to be about a young girl whose mother had died. The girl, Nishi, is looking forward to meeting her mother in Chicocaneedle-0. It's maybe four hundred years old and it's in about four languages.

Jonathan

COLD PIZZA


LA LUNA RIÉLA, I VIENTO POPA!  
I A TODA VELA!  
EN

COLD PIZZA

I A CANTARI, I A BAÍLARI  
EN UN LUGAR <sup>de</sup> CUYO NOMBRE  
ME QUIERO <sup>^</sup> NO ACORDAR...

IT IS WHAT IT IS. WHAT IT  
IS. WHAT IT IS. IS

COLD PIZZA

A vibrant, hand-drawn illustration of a city street scene. In the foreground, a street sign on a green post reads 'AND'. The street is lined with tall, multi-story buildings in shades of brown and orange. Lush green trees and bushes line the sidewalks. A blue sky with light clouds is visible above. The overall style is expressive and artistic, using thick strokes of color.

THE FENS.  
THE ARBORWAY  
BOSTON STREET  
AND THE  
BACK BAY  
I DO SING ABOUT BOSTON  
I MUST SAY

AND WHEN I SING IN BOSTON, AND I SENSE  
THE CROWD WILL UNDERSTAND, I MIGHT "TRAVEL"  
WITH THEM AWHILE, AS MUCH IN A DREAM AS NOT  
AS LONG AS HEART AND SENTIMENT  
ARE ALL WE'VE GOT.

- JOYCE KATHAN

BELow THE GROUNd

IN THE CAVERNs

WITH THE WATERWAYS AND

THE STEAM,

THERE ON THE SUBFLOOR

DOES TIME EVEN PASS

DOWN HERE

WOULD YOU SAY?

⇒ BAJO  
LA TIERRA EN EL  
SUBSUELO ⇐

OKAY, I DID PUT THE WORDS AND MUSIC TOGETHER TO MAKE THIS SONG AND ALSO THE ONE "¿HA MUERTO LA ROSA?" BUT I GOT THE IDEAS AND WORDS FROM A BOOK MADE IN MEXICO CITY IN 1952.

THE BOOK IS «HACIA EN INFINITO» ESCUELA MAGNETICO de la E.U. put this out. No author is listed.









TAXI HEADS TOWARD  
KENMORE SQUARE  
ON LONGWOOD  
AVENUE IN  
THE EARLY  
1970's,

John F. Davis

People write letters, especially once they realize that that's the only way they can get in touch with me – me not having "e-mail" or anything like that. So, they write. This is fine with me because I like to hear what's on peoples' minds.

Young people, especially, are likely to, in their letters, ask for recommendations as to books or music. So I'm recommending "MAYBE THE PEOPLE WOULD BE THE TIMES" by Luc Sante. I've also read his intriguing "THE OTHER PARIS" and "LOW LIFE- Lures and Snares of Old New York."

I get the idea that younger people, here in the U.S. especially, are, if they're in the arts, looking for a model, a template for a "bohemian" art scene. You can't make these scenes happen, but books like these might help by recounting what has gone before.

Not only can you not force such a confluence of inspired, creative people; you can't even maintain one once its time has passed. I found this out in New York City in 1969 and 1970, when I was eighteen.

The scene that flourished between 1964 and 1968 around Andy Warhol's art "Factory" – consisting mainly of two and three dimensional visual arts plus collaborations with musicians, notably The Velvet Underground, was fading by the time I got there in the summer of 1969. Why so quick a demise? Well, Andy Warhol got shot, almost fatally, in spring '68 and that toned down everything. As Sterling Morrison told me, "You were two years too late, Jonathan."

So, I learned what I could, experimented with playing in public in Greenwich Village – including an "experiment" with an unplugged electric guitar, eight stories up, on the roof-edge of the cockroach and rat infested Hotel Albert, yelling my latest songs down to the confused pedestrians eighty feet below, who started gathering, but NOT because I was so great, like I thought, but because they thought I was going to jump (!) or... that I, at least, should be giving the matter due consideration.

At nineteen, it dawned on me that New York was not going to be for me what I thought it was, so I went back to Boston to put together a band. The name of the band, The Modern Lovers, and a lot of the songs we'd eventually play, came together sort of at once in my mind.

My first six months back in Boston/Cambridge, I missed New York so bad, with its high-speed style and its concentrated intensity. Boston seemed so sleepy. But my band came together as if by magic, and week by week, I realized that providence had put me in the perfect place for the art scene I would need. (Young people! Listen to me! Do not despair! The same will happen to you if you do not give up!)

It would be ten years before I would again spend any significant time in New York, and when I did I learned something else; that art and music scenes can die and be reborn in the same town in a morphed way – maybe a different form of art, maybe the center of it being in a different part of the city from the scene of the past. You will read about exactly this art scene if you read the book “Maybe The People Would Be The Times” in the chapter “Bass Culture.” The East Village it describes had changed so much from what I’d know ten years before! The book’s description of that wide-open, sex-stereotype-defying, built-on-the-rubble-of-the-past, using-the-past-for-spare-parts, low-rent-thrift-store-and-vacant-lot time puts you right there.

Also check out “The Other Paris,” because the descriptions of the 1905 Montmartre art scene will be similarly inspiring. In both scenes, penniless artists made “chic” out of whatever was around and was cheap.

Oh, while I just said three paragraphs ago that ya can’t really make a scene like this, one or two people can, by healthy and audacious disregard for what anyone thinks of them or their work, have fun with the act of self-expression.

In fact, more important that the finding of an art scene might be this attitude of disregarding whatever scene there is or is not. If you have something to express, express it.

Let ‘em laugh. Let ‘em boo. Let ‘em ignore ya. If they like what you do, fine, if they don’t, that’s fine too. Don’t give up. Give ‘em a chance to get used to ya.

If anyone wants to write, I’m at P.O. Box 3959  
Chico, California  
95927 U.S.A

I can be a touch slow in responding, depending on the time of year, etc. but I’ll get to ya, unless I’ve lost your return address or something, which happens...

MORNING  
AFTER

WINTER







1. Just A Spark, On Journey From  
The Dark - *September 1, 2020*

2. Want To Visit  
My Inner House? -  
*September 15, 2020*

3. A Visit  
From Tommy -  
*October 1, 2020*

4. What A Summer!  
*October 15, 2020*

5. Cold  
Pizza -  
*November 1, 2020*

6. The  
Fenway -  
*November 15, 2020*

Photo: Robert W. Hart

*A Companion Booklet for Episodes 1-6*

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