



antigen records

For immediate release

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Big Sea by Rev Simpkins & the Phantom Notes (antigen 353)

Illustrated by Tom Knight

With a foreword by Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York

Released in hardback, saddle-stitched, and digital versions on 25th September 2020

Big Sea, Rev Simpkins' new album and 32-page illustrated book is a life-affirming meditation on hope during dark times. This new collection of exuberant and eccentric songs was written during the Rev's diagnosis, treatment and recovery from cancer and drummer James De'ath's illness with sepsis. What resulted was an emotive celebration of the peaks and troughs of life and death told through off-kilter songs about east coast creeks, shattering storms, mystic pelicans and the Colchester martyrs. Artist Tom Knight's illustrations and typesetting of the lyrics add further life to the album's striking images and sentiments.

The Reverend Matt Simpkins is the fourth generation of his family to be ordained priest in the Church of England. Prior to ordination, Matt was a professional musician. He collaborated with Kenney Jones of the Small Faces to reconstruct the orchestral parts of their 1968 psychedelic masterpiece *Ogden's Nut Gone Flake*, and gained notoriety through his raucous and melodious exploits in FuzzFace and heavy-weight hollering in gospel fiddle duo Sons of Joy. The Reverend's 2008 LP, *Babbler & Crow*, and 2009 LP, *Lions* were praised by the national folk and music press, and were heralded by the legendary poet-musician Martin Newell. Eleven years since the last Rev album, Matt's unexpected illness brought with it an opportunity to make new music.

Rev Simpkins's distinctive sound is a brew of outlandish tunefulness, string-snapping fingerpicking, and sanctified psychedelia. Shades of the Kinks, Captain Beefheart, and Pavement meld with church choirs and pipe organs, pre-war Gospel Blues, strings, brass bands, and Bert Jansch style finger-twanged guitar. *Big Sea* features singer-songwriter Ady Johnson, Daniel Merrill (Dead Rat Orchestra, Sons of Joy), and Toby Bull (FuzzFace) and was recorded in Cornard (Suffolk), Colchester (Essex) and Cairo (Egypt) in the spring of 2020.

The book, which is available as a hardback or a heavy-weight saddle-stitched paperback, was designed by artist and author Tom Knight. Tom, who comes from Mersea Island, is described by *The Sunday Times* as 'skilled...multitalented...deserves to be better known'.

Matt Simpkins commented, 'Once I was ordained, I assumed I'd never have an opportunity to write and record again. But when (and probably because) I got ill the songs started flowing once more until we found we had enough for an album. *Big Sea* is a candid and curious musical diary of that time. It's hopeful and joyous because it takes the darkness of life seriously, so the light can be appreciated even more. It's designed to be listened to while enjoying Tom's wonderful illustrations.'

Big Sea is released by antigen records on 25th September 2020.

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Full press pack and high resolution photographs can be found at www.revsimpkins.com/press/

Riding the Swells

The Rev's guide to navigating *Big Sea*

Advent (Whispered Light)

"The shock and utter bafflement of a moment of diagnosis. A glimmer of light amid swells of feedback and stylophone."

Big Sea

"A cleric's take on *Lust for Life*, with a smattering of brass band and a dollop of profound impatience with waiting lists."

Creek Sailor

"It turns out the shallows are more dangerous than the depths."

Pelican

"Swirling strings weave an ancient mystical image into heady psychedelia."

Psalm

"A 3,000 year-old song I wrote last July"

Asleep in the Stern

"Shattering storms needn't destroy everything. If I'd only known where to look."

Song of the Martyr's Lover

"What would it feel like to love someone who went to the stake for a cause? Based on the true story of the Colchester Martyr, Rose Alleyn."

Holy Innocents' Day

"How old stories help tackle new injustices."

All Feeling Sense Seems to be Gone

"The remarkable words of a 19th century hymn, electrified."

Hands

"What I've learned from burying and baptising people."

Welsh Jane

"A love song about car sickness, salt air, real life."

Out of the Depths

"When you find all the words you should pray quite absurd, and the hope once preached is eluding you...write a song."

Sing Your Life

"While breath remains within me, I shall not keep from singing."



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Who the hell is Rev Simpkins?

The Reverend Matthew Simpkins – sinner-songwriter, guttural gospeller and pop-poet-priest – performs a heady brew of bruising freak blues, soaring harmonies, string-snapping finger-picked folk, and sanctified psychedelia.

In the fourth generation of his family to become a Church of England priest, Matt's preceding time as a professional musician saw him collaborating with the remaining members of the Small Faces to reconstruct the orchestral parts to their number one LP, *Ogden's Nut Gone Flake*, as well as performing with underground mod band FuzzFace, and fiery gospel-fiddle duo Sons of Joy.

Brought up a Vicar's son in Sudbury, a small market town Suffolk, England, Matt gained a reputation for naughtiness, fire, and unfettered musical imagination as a child. After an adolescence of playing fiddle with the local Morris dancers, organ for Evensong at his Dad's church, and raucous Hammond organ for garage bands, Matt's strange musical talent propelled him unexpectedly from the local comprehensive to Oxford University, where he was a choral scholar. While at Oxford, Matt's catholic musical passions caused a kerfuffle when his dissertation on the Mothers of Invention drew an angry letter from the chairman of the examiners.

From 2008-2011 Rev Simpkins performed with his 9-piece freak orchestra, the Phantom Notes at many curious venues ranging from Snape Maltings Concert Hall and Whitechapel Art Gallery to redundant churches, motorway flyovers, and village halls. His first two LPs, *Babbler & Crow* and *Lions* are packed with off-kilter stories, dark jokes, allegories, parables, and brazenly reworked Bible tales. Both albums received critical acclaim and the plaudits of legendary musician-poet Martin Newell.

Having left music (apparently for good) to train for ordination in 2012, Rev Simpkins returns in 2020 with *Big Sea*, his first album for 11 years. An unexpected diagnosis and treatment for a rare form of skin cancer (incidentally, the same that Bob Marley had) in 2019 provided the opportunity for the Rev to return to composing. The resulting album, *Big Sea*, written around and about this time of illness is an exuberant celebration of the peaks and troughs of life and death through songs about east coast creeks, shattering storms, mystic pelicans and martyrs. Shades of Captain Beefheart, the Kinks and Pavement meld with church choirs and pipe organs, pre-war Gospel Blues, string orchestras, brass bands, and Bert Jansch style finger-picking.

The Reverend Matt Simpkins is Priest in Charge of St Leonard's Church, Lexden, Colchester.

Praise for Rev Simpkins

On preview copies of *Big Sea*:

“Visually and musically a thing of sheer beauty...one of the most impressive releases to come my way during my 40-plus years in the radio industry...absolutely stunning”
East Anglian Daily Times, 15th August 2020

“An incredible piece of work”
BBC Radio Suffolk

On *Babbler & Crow* and *Lions*:

“...he might just scoop a Mercury Prize...”
Martin Newell, Poet for *The Independent* and musician

“High octane stuff...unique musical style and literate words performed with energy and passion. He must be a gas live.”
fROOTS, April 09

“Deep, dark...makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up”
Maverick Magazine, August 2009

"An anarchic, chaotic and hard to classify romp through the murkier depths of Matthew Simpkins' mind...raw, authentic and always riveting."
Acoustic Magazine, May 09

“skewed blues and rot-gut jugband swagger...a heady mix.”
Rock 'n' Reel, March/April 09

“Inspires a mixture of joy, confusion and awe in equal measure”
Everything Folk

“I wonder what goes on inside his head”
Blues Matters

Lions – **GRAPEVINE** ALBUM OF THE YEAR 2009