



antigen records

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.