

For immediate release

Saltings by Rev Simpkins (antigen 383)

An album of ten illustrations by Tom Knight and ten songs by Matt Simpkins, presented with a 210mm square artbook

Saltings is an album of ten illustrations by Tom Knight and ten songs by Matt Simpkins created in and about the 'saltings' of Essex. It is a loving portrait of the mystery and beauty of this salt marsh wilderness, and a meditation on the real human cost of the wilderness time of the pandemic.

Found within 50 miles from London, the saltings are one of England's last natural wild spaces. Working as a parish priest a few miles away, Matt came to the saltings to retreat and compose these compelling and compassionate songs about his community's real-life experiences during the pandemic. *Saltings* portrays hope found amid wilderness.

The album weaves together tales of the legendary and mysterious figures of the saltings, such as John Ball (leader of the peasants' revolt) and Saint Cedd (whose Saxon chapel stands at Bradwell), with reflections on the wilderness's ever-changing tides, skies, and seasons. *Saltings* is an attempt to share the atmosphere and history of this remarkable place in picture and song.

Rev Simpkins' music mixes the eccentric folk tradition of Dock Boggs and Frank Proffitt, with the melodiousness and carefully-observed lyrics of the Kinks, and the gritty unpredictability of Tom Waits and early Beefheart. Close harmonies intertwine with French horns, pipe organs, intricate picking, and the songs of the saltings' curlews and skylarks.

Tom Knight is a native of Mersea Island and a talented artist and designer. He has illustrated many acclaimed books including *Shadow Chaser* (Usborne), *When Jelly Had a Wobble* (Scholastic), and *Good Knight, Bad Knight and the Flying Machine* (Templar: *Sunday Times* children's book of the week) which he also wrote. Tom brought his soulful and playful eye to illustrating the saltings' landscape with the love of someone who has spent their life there.

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 wrote and performed music with the Hammond-driven garage band FuzzFace and fiery fiddle duo Sons of Joy. Rev Simpkins 2008 LP, *Babbler & Crow*, and 2009 LP, *Lions* were praised by the national folk and music press. A decade later, a period of illness brought an opportunity to make new music and the Rev released the hope-filled album *Big Sea* in 2020, which received rave reviews and was selected as one of Louder than War's albums of 2020.

Matt writes, 'I wrote these songs walking the saltings during the pandemic, pondering the tears of exhaustion, anger, fear, frustration and mourning that I'd seen in others. So the songs are themselves saltings: little tears. Instead of weeping, I wrote and I sang. But these aren't sorrowful songs. I hope they speak of the hope that resides in the saltings, and of real life and real compassion.'

The *Saltings* book is printed on high quality, heavy aquarello gesso art paper.

Art prints of Tom Knight's illustrations for *Saltings* will be available from tomknightillustration.co.uk.

Saltings is released by antigen records on 25th March 2022.

ENDS

For further information, promos, interviews contact
Jason Whittaker NUMBER Jason.whittaker@hotmail.co.uk
or Matt Simpkins +44 (0)7941 142755 thematthewsimpkins@gmail.com

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

Rev Simpkins

The Reverend Matthew Simpkins, sinner-songwriter and pop-poet-priest, is Priest in Charge of St Leonard's Church, Lexden, Colchester.

In the fourth generation of his family to become a Church of England priest, Matt's time as a professional musician before ordination 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 working as an orchestrator and arranger, and performing with garage 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 unfettered 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 unusual musical creativity propelled him unexpectedly from the local comprehensive to Oxford University, where he was a choral scholar. While at college 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 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 returned in 2020 with *Big Sea*, his first album for 11 years. An unexpected diagnosis and treatment for a rare form of cancer in 2019 provided the opportunity for the Rev to return to composing and recording. 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.

His latest album, *Saltings*, is a close collaboration with the Mersea Island artist, Tom Knight, who has created a stunning work of art for each song. *Saltings* is a loving portrait of the mystery and beauty of the salt marsh wildernesses of Essex, as well as a meditation on the human cost of the wilderness time of the pandemic as experienced through Matt's work in funeral and pastoral ministry. Like *Big Sea*, *Saltings* is most of all a record of unblinking realism amidst darkness, and of a hope grounded in human experience.

Press for Rev Simpkins

On *Big Sea* (2020):

9/10 *Vive le Rock*:

“spine tingling... [an] astonishing album...if you can imagine Tom Waits collaborating with the early Captain Beefheart on a set of folk-psych songs, you’ll be somewhere close to the sound of ‘Big Sea’...utterly intriguing from start to finish.”

5/5 *RnR Magazine*:

“There is an extraordinary intensity about this album...and [its] dark but sublime musings on mortality, sin and the divine...intelligent and articulate work couched in never-less-than-interesting, and often breath-taking musical arrangement...I can only say I’m deeply grateful for a unique encounter.”

East Anglian Daily Times:

“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”

One of *Louder Than War’s* albums of 2020

On *Babbler & Crow* and *Lions*:

“...he might just scoop a Mercury Prize...” **Martin Newell**

“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**

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