

SongFarmers, Front Porches, Love ... and iPhones

The WFPA: A New Way of being a Musician

(ITEM: Lexington, KY) It's a new idea for a music business that has changed so much that, frankly, it was inevitable ... but folksinger Michael Johnathon has released the very first national album recorded entirely on an iPhone.

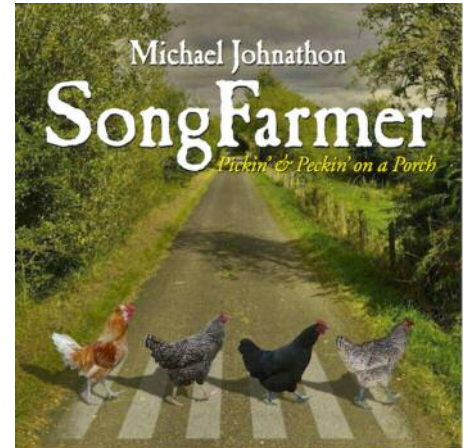
"I wanted to imply the feel of an early folk recording using 21st century technology," he says from his log cabin home in Kentucky. The album is actually a musical statement in support of the recording arts. Johnathon, like most artists, laments the loss of CD sales, budgets and the ability to actually create art in a recording studio.

"Some of the most talented audio sculptors in the world, recording engineers, are losing their careers as the music industry changes and budgets decline," says Johnathon. *"We are living among the first generation in human history that receives art and music as a non-organic, flat screen, digital two-dimensional experience. Fans don't even get to hold an album jacket anymore."*

In fact, few people listen to complete albums on nice stereo systems and the public is being conditioned to hear only singles from a project. It reflects the dramatic changes happening in the music business. The compact disc is being phased out and even new cars don't have CD players in them, just a USB port. It leaves visionary artists in a quandary: the idea of a concept album - a full musical cycle like Pink Floyd's *The Wall* or the Beatles *Sergeant Pepper* - is becoming extinct.

So, the *SongFarmer* album was recorded on the same system the public is being trained to listen on: a smart phone. Which, oddly enough, isn't all that bad. The iPhone, as a recording platform, far surpasses what the Beatles recorded *Abby Road* on. Using high end Ear Trumpet mics, the Apogee Quartet with the multi-track Maestro, MetaRecorder apps plus his artist cabin as the studio, Johnathon set about the task of creating the album.

"The technology is such that I could have recorded upwards of 32 tracks per song," says Johnathon, *"but because of the concept behind this particular project, a folk album, the recording was kept very simple and acoustic."*



WoodSongs Front Porch Association

The *SongFarmer* album has a more specific use. It will introduce the efforts of the WoodSongs Front Porch Association (WFPA) to media and 1,400 radio stations around the world.



*"We need a Front Porch
'round the World"*

The WFPA is an international organization of people who want to share the love of roots music and the community it creates." says Art Menius, a board member and also a founder of the IBMA. The group calls its members "SongFarmers," thus the album title.

A "SongFarmer" is an artist who uses music to make their families, hometowns, and careers better.

Established in 2015 by a group of experienced folk and bluegrass leaders, the WFPA goal is to spread the spirit of the Front Porch into home towns around the world through the good works of the SongFarmer community. Members of the WFPA feel music does not have to be your livelihood to be a powerful, amazing part of your life. The front porch was once the grand pulpit of America's neighborhoods where moms, dads, kids, and friends would gather to sing a summer evening away.

Ron Pen, director of the John Jacob Niles Center for American Music at the University of Kentucky, is a founding member of the WFPA Creative board. He finds the image of the front porch to be a powerful tool in explaining the intent behind the organization:

"The front porch is that vibrant intersection between the interior community of family, home, and hearth, and the outside world of friends and neighbors," explains Dr. Pen. *"The WFPA invites us to engage our music with neighbors in a joyous celebration of community."*

The WoodSongs Gathering Member Conference

A member-supported organization, the WFPA strives to be effective, while being as cost efficient as possible. Membership is only \$25 a year for a family or band, up to five persons. On top of that, all members get FREE tickets to the yearly WFPA music festival and member conference, called The Gathering. In 2016 the *WoodSongs Gathering Member Conference & Music Festival* will be at historic Shaker Village outside of Lexington, KY and well over 600 members are expected to attend.

"It shouldn't cost a struggling musician upwards of \$1000 to join, pay conference fees, travel, hotel, and meals just to attend a conference about an industry that is in trouble and can't really help them," says Doug Oines, president of the American Nickelharpa Association and WFPA board member. *"Most artists getting showcases often end up performing for other artists that wish they had your time slot. Being part of that community is great but it simply should not be so expensive."*

Musician and activist Rik Palieri of Vermont is a WFPA founding member with decades of experience as a community driven folksinger and helped organize the first WFPA Gathering.

"The idea behind the WFPA Gathering brings us back to the reason we all make and love home made music in the first place," says Palieri while on the road. *"It brings our members together, young and old, in a way that transcends money. The Gathering treats music like a garden, and our Songfarmers are musically planting seeds for generations to come."*



WFPA Classroom and Education Project

The membership proceeds of the WFPA not only support the Gathering but also another vital project: sending roots music in classrooms worldwide. Using select broadcasts of the *WoodSongs Old-Time Radio Hour*, teachers and home school families get to choose from an array of streaming projects for classroom use with lesson plans for middle, high and college level students. To date, over 1,000 teachers and homeschool families have already begun using the free roots music programs provided by the WFPA.



As a teacher or parent, do you want to introduce the banjo to students? Here's a WoodSongs broadcast with Bela Fleck and Abigail Washburn. The guitar? Check out Australian master Tommy Emmanuel. American jazz? Use the show with Preservation Hall Jazz Band. Civil rights? Try Sweet Honey in the Rock ... with lesson plans. All for free.

Raymond McLain is a master bluegrass musician plus the Director of the Kentucky Center for Traditional Music at Morehead State University. As a music educator, he sees a need for the WFPA Classroom program.

"Many arts and music budgets have been slashed but never restored as the economy improved," says McLain. *"The WoodSongs Classroom projects expose kids to incredible inspiration plus a way for them to put that passion in practice. What's great for teachers and home school families is the WFPA provides the entire education package free of charge."*

WFPA SongFarmer Hometown Music Clubs

Another free project of the WFPA is encouraging members to organize community jams, called SongFarmer Music Clubs. WFPA members simply organize a group, have a pot-luck gathering on a porch, basement, local club or school house and play home made music together. Penny Lane Diersing is a radio personality with WSVX Giant FM near Indianapolis, IN and organized her hometown chapter of the SongFarmers Music Club with the help of friends,



"When I heard about it I was excited," she says. *"Our community responded fast and the singers, poets, fans and musicians love the idea of just gathering together for no other reason than the love of music. In a world of arguing, anger, fighting and disagreement it's nice to have the chance to be pleasant with each other."*

Why Love & SongFarming Works

One of the more helpful efforts of the WFPA is to take an honest look at the music business and how the volcanic changes affect their members. They encourage SongFarmers to look past the money and do brilliant, good work, even for free, as the best business plan for their lives, families, hometowns and careers.

"It's a simple fact: love is the greatest transaction of all the arts," says Johnathon. "Artists need to start using that very uncomfortable word again. It is the glue that binds an artist, a song and an audience together."

In fact, "free" seems to be the business model of the new century. Most major companies are using it successfully: Facebook, Google, YouTube and others give their product away free, not necessarily out of love, and are now worth billions. To prove his point, Johnathon offers the huge success of his volunteer run, live audience broadcast of the *WoodSong Old-Time Radio Hour*, based completely on the free business model. Airing on over 500 radio stations, American Forces Radio Network in 173 nations plus across north America as a TV series on public TV, the broadcast has become the biggest folk and roots program in the world. Yet neither Johnathon, the crew that produces over 40 shows a year or even the artists who appear on stage get paid a cent.

Josh Dunson, another WFPA Board member who has worked with community driven artists like Pete Seeger, Peggy Seeger and Si Kahn for over 40 years agrees.

"The WFPA's success centers around artists linked to their home by the desire to bring excellence to their communities, all inspired for the love of it," says Dunson. "It reminded me of all the time Pete Seeger and others donated to clean up the Hudson River in New York with the sloop Clearwater. It works and that is the spirit the WFPA claims as its own."

Kari Estrin is a founding member of the WFPA and also a Nashville based artist manager and career expert who works with hundreds of professional artists. She sees how a change in thinking can actually help career-minded folks as well:

"When an artist donates their time and energy to build community and help make their world a better place," says Estrin, "a wonderful thing happens, their audience enlarges, becomes more loyal and ensures further success in their musical careers."

This can mean artists retraining their thinking to match a realistic business model of the current music world. It's no longer about money, it's about heart. In the end, the WFPA is attempting to gather the thousands of dreamers, poets, writers, front porch pickers and performers, most of whom engage in their art as more than an act of commerce. They do it out of love.

"There is a whole world of unbridled passion waiting to be tapped," says Chicago publicist and booking agent Loretta Sawyer. "All they need is a little direction, some projects to focus on, some tools to use. Being a SongFarmer means you view your music as seeds, your audience as a garden and your heart, your love, as the water that makes it grow. That is what the WFPA is for."



And if all of this wasn't enough, the WFPA in conjunction with the University of Kentucky created the SongFarmer-L listserve, a way for the SongFarming community worldwide to keep in touch, trade ideas, offer experiences and songs ... and yes, it's free.

For information on becoming a SongFarmer, starting a hometown music club, joining the WFPA, using the WFPA Classroom projects in your schools or to hear samples of the SongFarmer album, visit SongFarmers.org

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