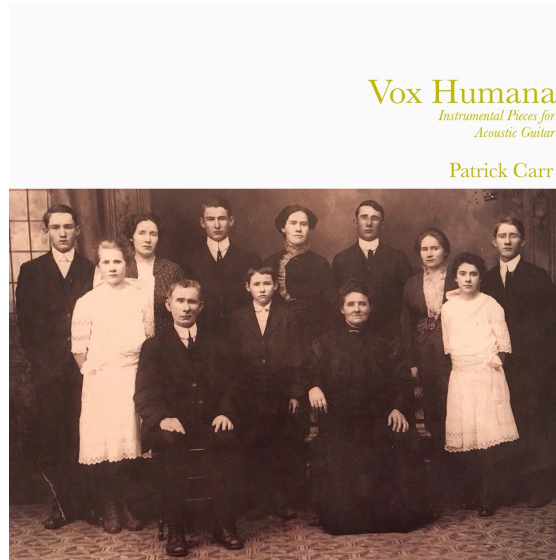


Patrick Carr releases new instrumental album “Vox Humana”

By Brian Tucker

Carr creates a moody, personal sounding collection of material.



Patrick Carr’s *Vox Humana* is the result of music he didn’t think he had a home for. The collection follows 2017’s *When the Road Darkens*, and in many respects *Vox Humana* is a companion to it, though more spare and stark at times. If *When the Road Darkens* is the sunrise then *Vox Humana* is the grey day.

On both albums the music has strong personality – distinct tonality and atmosphere against reserved vocals. While it’s easy to suggest the vibe of his music would be at home in the early 90s, Carr (with recording engineer Ian Millard on both albums) goes further, taking a right when your ear thinks it’s probably going left in terms of melody and song craft. It’s carefully measured light and dark, making for easy listening but certainly not candy colored material.

Vox Humana is comprised of all instrumentals and it’s hard to imagine vocals added to them. That’s largely due to Carr’s melodies and the richness of the tracks themselves. Across five tracks, whether it’s the contemplative “Eurydice” at four minutes or the nine minute mini-epic “Black Mountain/The Burial of the Dead,” each carries the weight of darkness underneath the rural sounding music. “Missy” is the most charming, but its whimsical melody is bears the feeling of uncertainty.

If you’re a fan of film scores, namely the work of Warren Ellis and Nick Cave, this is for you. Below Carr talks about recording again with Ian Millard, looking back on *When the Road Darkens*, and how he’s spending time at home during the pandemic.

What led to an album of instrumentals? A catalyst, or even a feeling, that led to it?

Carr: I’ve only been singing for about six years now, so beforehand the guitar sort of was my voice. Throughout the years, I’ve kind of collected these instrumental songs that didn’t seem to have a home, so I decided to sit

down to record them and then release them. I personally love instrumental guitar music, like John Fahey, and guess I wanted a record of my own like that. It's definitely not the most accessible or popular kind of music, but I figured the songs weren't doing me any good being locked in my head. Besides, there are other record nerds like me out there that might be into it.

Sonically, you're telling a story and we get to figure out what that story is. It brings to mind rural, rustic qualities.

Carr: Yeah, that's kind of the beauty about instrumental music. It can say so much, but without using tangible words. There's also the possibility for this real emotional depth that is really satisfying. To me, the music needs to be transportive and evoke something; it has to take me to a specific place, time, or emotion. That's the most effective music, in my opinion. There's this guitar player I'm a huge fan of named Daniel Bachman and he wrote this piece called "A Dog Named Pepper." I was so struck with how much emotion he was able to convey in just a single acoustic guitar, and that was something I wanted to achieve when I wrote "The Burial of the Dead."



I've been told before that my music would work well in films. Years ago, a buddy said "Misty Mountain Reel" would work well in this documentary a friend of his was producing. I have done the music for a small documentary film one of my best friends made in college about his grandparents who were in the Japanese internment camps during WWII. I wouldn't mind scoring music for films. That sounds fun.

Does the music, or the track, speak to you in terms of whether it should have lyrics?

Carr: For me, it's kind of what I can hear in my head. Usually when I start writing, I'm also kind of hearing what the end product will end up sounding like, though it's somewhat hazy at first. Usually when writing the guitar part, I can also hear this vocal melody. The instrumental songs tend to be more labyrinthine in their arrangements, so adding vocals, in a way, kind of detract from the music or would feel out of place.

The album title is curious given it's without vocals. And the artwork. Family photo?

Carr: Yeah, I partially chose it because I was being a bit clever about it. But it kind of stuck around for me since it seemed so evocative. Like I was saying earlier, the guitar and instrumental music can say a lot without an actual voice saying it. Making the artwork is always kind of a process. I usually will make about three or four different designs and then kind of sit on it for a bit.

The photo I ended up using on the cover is an old family photo my dad has. Front and center seated are my great-great-great grandparents. I guess I ended up using it partially because it's personal, but also I liked the "stuck-in-time" feeling the photo and album title as a combination gave me.

Ian Millard has recorded several acoustic albums. Does he approach the process in ways that helped you?

Carr: I'm a self-admitted perfectionist sometimes, and it's easy for me to not be able to see the forest from the trees. Ian definitely helps make the process of recording easier, since he is incredibly good at what he does, but he also is a great objective opinion. Since he's also a musician, he knows what to say to help get a better performance out of everyone involved. We also communicate really well. I can sort of explain what I'm hearing or wanting in abstract/poor terms, and he seems to get it.

Looking back, what do you see/hear that represents you growing as a guitar player?

Carr: I'm always trying to grow as a guitar player and challenge myself to explore in order to avoid everything sounding the same or becoming stale. You can actually kind of see the progression since this EP covers a lot of years and development. "Eurydice" was the first sort of thing I've ever written and that was maybe thirteen years ago. "In the Golden Hour" is the newest instrumental I wrote and it almost didn't make the record, but I liked it so much I did everything I could to get it on there.

Did you have any surprises recording this compared to When the Road Darkens?

Carr: Recording this EP was pretty straightforward compared to When the Road Darkens. When the Road Darkens had a lot of pieces to it. This new EP is a bit starker comparatively since I didn't want to distract from the guitar, which was the star of the show. Mostly, it was recording the guitar as the bedrock and then adding instrumentation that compliments the guitar.

When the Road Darkens came out almost three years ago, and while I still think it's a great record, I feel like I've grown more confident as a finger style guitarist. I'm actually almost done recording a full length record and that one is also pretty heavy on the finger style playing. I just need to get the vocals done, so it should hopefully be out this year.

Was the nine minute track the most difficult to get down?

Carr: That song was by far the hardest thing I've tried to record. I think I tried recording it on seven different occasions with probably ten takes each. It wasn't so much the length of it that was hard, but the actual piece itself. There are a lot of moving parts to it and with finger style guitar, you need to be precise.

Are you finding the forced time off conducive to creating or working on other projects? How are you holding up?

Carr: I'm doing alright. The social isolation can be conducive towards creativity. One of my favorite records is the first Bon Iver record For Emma, Forever Ago; the notion of locking yourself away in isolation and coming out with this cathartic record speaks to me. That being said, I think this kind of quarantine is way less romantic. It's easy to kind of get lost in countless hours of video games and watching Tiger King, but when not doing that it is nice to have the time to sit down and be creative.

So far I've written two new songs and I'm actually recording them myself currently. I'm sending them off to my friend so he can record drums and backing vocals at his house. This sort of project is kind of being created in a vacuum, so I have a more relaxed attitude about it and am more along for the ride to see where it takes me.