

Michael Johnathon and the message of America's Front Porch



ITEM: Lexington, KY

He is a banjo playing folksinger. His worldview is shaped from the front porch of his Log Cabin home outside of Lexington Kentucky.

“Never before in the history of the world has the need to revisit the meaning and spirit of the front porch been so needed,” he says.

Indeed, war, pandemic and economic uncertainty, civil unrest and gun violence, the shattering of accepted norms and the incessant social media noise have caused many to look back to re-examine where we are heading.

“This is not a political idea. It’s not left or right, republican or democrat, black or white, liberal or conservative. It is hometowns and neighbors, families and friends. It’s America, Canada, Ireland and beyond.” says Johnathon. **“It’s the poetic calmness of rural communities that built arguably the greatest nation in world history.”**

There is merit in that musical message. Generations ago there was a Slavic saying that went, *“if everyone in the whole world simply took care of their own homes you would not have to worry about the world anymore.”* In the 1960s that was rephrased into a bumper sticker, *“Think globally. Act locally.”*

To that end, the community-driven Michael Johnathon is not your average folksinger. A prolific songwriter with 19 nationally released albums, six published books, he also created and hosts a mammoth all volunteer-run public radio and TV broadcast, the WoodSongs Old Time Radio Hour airing on over 500 radio stations, millions of TV homes on PBS stations and the RFD TV Network, and worldwide on the American Forces Radio Network.

In fact, the WoodSongs broadcast is described on-air as a multi-media front porch.

He conceived and created the national community of SongFarmers, artists and musicians faced with the post pandemic collapse of the music world and redirecting their efforts into their home towns and communities. Already there are 89 active chapters from Australia, across America and Ireland.

“We are living among the first generation in human history that gets its music and art as a flatscreen, cell phone, digital tsunami of ones and zeros,” he says. **“The real, front porch, organic world of music and art is fading away.”**

Johnathon has tapping into a global need for friends, community and the genuine comfort that organic art can give in a world of incessant stress.

It is an unlikely career trajectory that hasn't been seen since folksinger Pete Seeger decided to build the Clearwater sloop to help clean up the Hudson river. While musicians and songwriters reach out for a golden ring that no longer exists in a record industry that has essentially collapsed, Michael Johnathon reaches instead to a global fan base made up of neighbors, families and fellow musicians.

“I think the truth of music and art is not being told to the world of struggling songwriters,” he says. **“There is an illusion that the age of million selling records and world tours are still there, but it is not. The truth is that 99% of musicians will not get a record deal, will not get a booking agent, will not become stars.”**

Johnathon believes in the passion and energy of those artists, that the greatest stage in the world is literally the emotional and spiritual front porch, the brightest spotlight shines on the figurative living room couch.

“Musicians have a wonderful opportunity to follow the example of artists like Pete Seeger, Harry Chapin and others, In the age of YouTube doing good work is the equivalent of having a hit record.”

Johnathon continues to tirelessly pursue the idea of good work. His latest book WoodSongs 5 is a tribute to the struggling artists of yesterday and today including Vincent van Gogh. He completed the screenplay for the pending motion picture, “Caney Creek: the Legend of Alice Lloyd,” described by industry producers as the Dances with Wolves of Appalachia.

Beginning in October, he is launching another volunteer run TV series dedicated to the music of youngsters called “WoodSongs Kids,” a *Mr. Rogers meets the Grand Ole Opry* style broadcast.

“I wish musicians understood that free is the new business model,” he explains. **“Facebook, Google, YouTube, Twitter allows everybody in the world to use their platforms absolutely free. It is very much an incarnation of the front porch business model. Music can work that way as well and you can accomplish amazing things with it.”**

WoodSongs was created and is sustained on the free business model. This past spring the folksinger reached out to the WoodSongs community and collected over 1000 instruments and delivered them free of charge to the musicians who lost everything in the ravage destruction of tornadoes in western Kentucky.

Recently, massive floods devastated the mountain communities of Appalachia and again he is enlisting the passionate front porch spirit of his fan-base to collect another 1000 guitars, banjos, dulcimers, pianos and more and deliver them free of charge to the musicians in the mountains.

His belief in the front porch spirit has resulted in powerful partnerships. The Commonwealth of Kentucky gave him the prestigious MILNER AWARD of the ARTS reserved for the likes of Wendell Berry, James Still, Jean Ritchie and others. The Department of Kentucky Tourism came on board as a global partner of WoodSongs.

“To me, Kentucky is like the comfortable rocking chair on America’s front porch,” he says.

To find out more on how you can participate in the musical efforts of America’s front porch spirit you can visit these websites:

woodsongs.com, songfarmers.org, michaeljohnathon.com



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