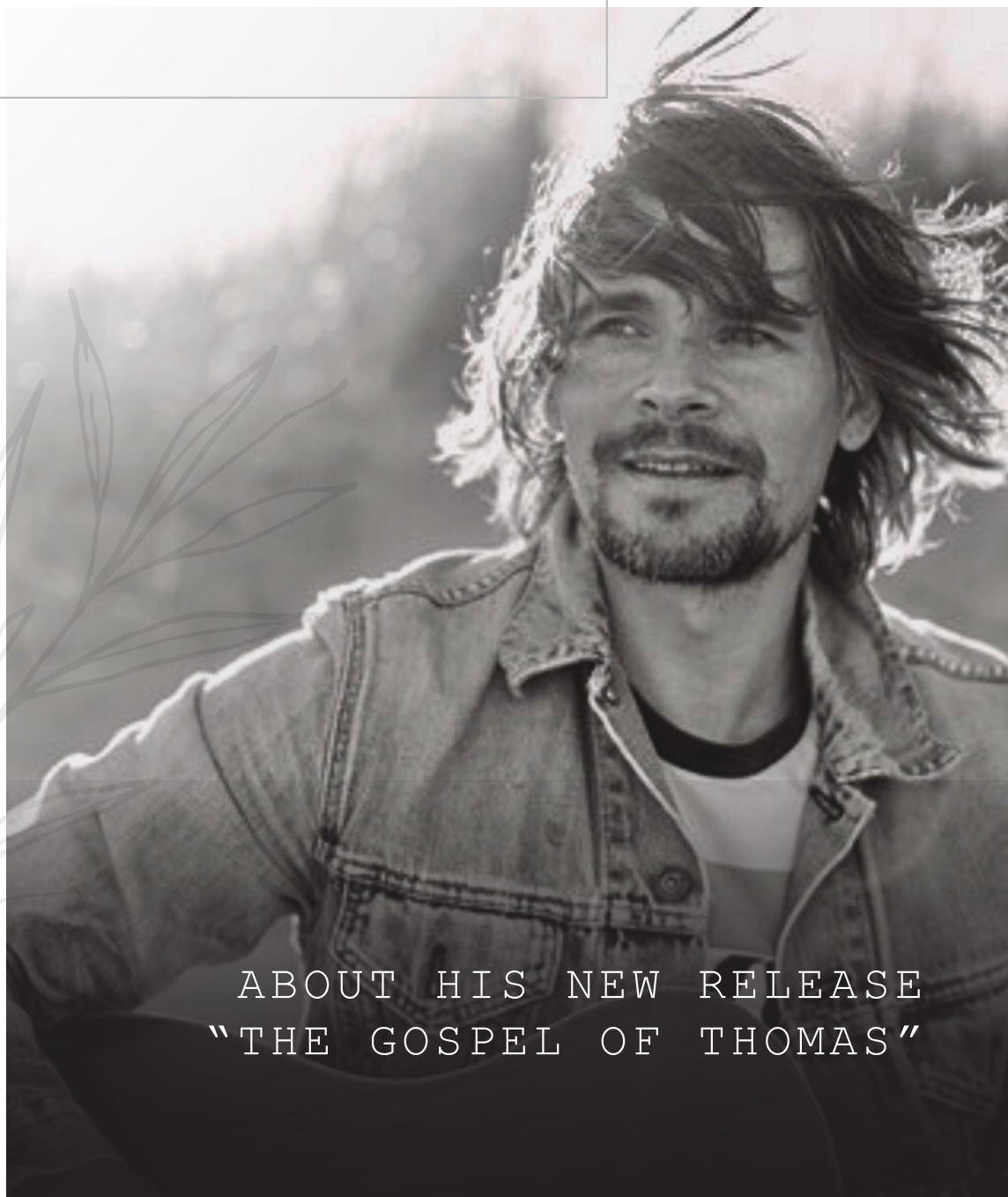


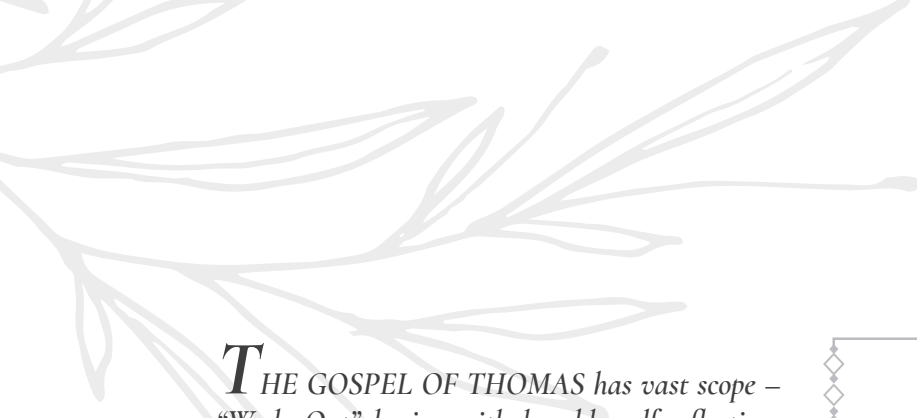


A CONVERSATION WITH

# HANS MATHESON



ABOUT HIS NEW RELEASE  
"THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS"



**T**HE GOSPEL OF THOMAS has vast scope – “Wade Out” begins with humble self-reflection, but swiftly moves from intimate to the...divine – quite literally. SAIL THE SEA came out in 2019, before the world changed. This second release could’ve sounded like an album thrown together because we were all stuck inside. It REALLY doesn’t. It sounds more like a piece created over years of writing, reflection, and exploration. How did THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS come about?

As you have guessed this is a piece of work that was many years in the making, shelved for a time because I had other ideas about what form would work best to present the music which I will go into later, but ultimately, I’m happy with the form it has now taken which I’d describe maybe as an audio film experience.

During my 30’s I felt a strong pull towards understanding myself better through therapy, spirituality, philosophy, and various religions ... there was a deep drive in me to find answers and solutions to the things that made me uncomfortable and, also, just sheer intrigue of what all of it was about ... I was always interested in this subject, but it was particularly intense during my 30’s ... it was an exciting time full of anticipation and aspiration ... also a challenging time full of disillusionment and upheaval. Whilst I was reading all these books and attending meetings I found myself trying to express through music the struggles illuminations or awakenings that were taking place in me ... as a friend once said to me ‘awakening is energetic’ the mind and words can only take you so far and the unknowable can never be defined but usually glimpsed and at first mis-understood, as it was in my case, in terms of seeing oneness and then pursuing it like a drug or an experience

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that can be attained or owned, that was how it was for me anyway, when in reality an experience comes and goes but oneness is ever present underneath everything because it is everything and nothing, .. the question is how can one find that which one already is? But the seeking ... the journey is all oneness too so there is nothing that is not exactly just as it should be. The very well-known T.S Elliot quote sums it up beautifully: ‘we shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time’

**T**he gnostic work, “The Gospel of Thomas” isn’t a narrative – it’s more a collection of parables, sayings, and dialogues. What’s the story of that title, for this music?

I could have just as easily used other writings for the ‘Voice of Oneness’ but the passages from the “Gospel of Thomas” are very dramatic and suggested a journey of some kind ... I first stumbled across “The Gospel of Thomas” by accident many years ago whilst filming in Dublin, I walked into a book shop hoping to find something about the character I was playing at the time, (Thomas Cramner in “The Tudors”) and I saw a book in the shop called the “Gospel of Thomas”. I picked it up hoping and thinking it might have something

to do with him ( Thomas Cranmer ), of course it didn't, but the passages or the sayings grabbed my attention straight away... the opening passage says 'seek and do not stop until you will find when you do find you will be disturbed after having been disturbed you will be astonished then you will reign over everything ' ... I remember thinking goodness me disturbed ? What could this disturbance be? Over time I began to see the possibility of a story unfolding. The words and metaphors used in "The Gospel of Thomas" had a profound effect on my mind. The music was born out of trying to understand what was being said in "The Gospel of Thomas" and of course many other books I was reading while attempting to deal with the challenges I was facing in my life. It is quite rare that a person doesn't go through hell while seeking although of course there are no rules...

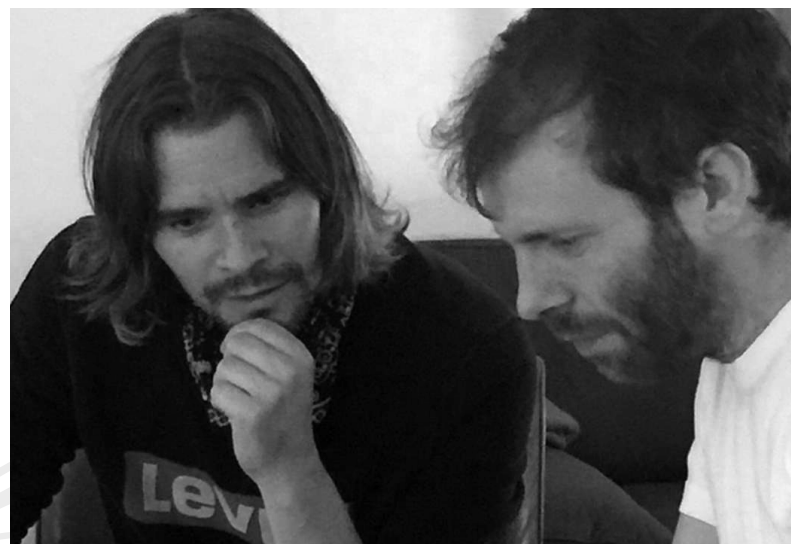
***H**ow experimental did you get in the process of making this music? I can hear other language, chants, quotes, scripture, vocal alteration, ambient sound scape – so much range. Did you set out with a vision in mind, with the intention of making a short of tone poem, or was it pure exploration?*

I explored many ways to try and merge the various discoveries... texts, sayings ... with the music I was writing and life experiences I had been through... I had a lot of fun playing with different sounds and instruments... capturing nature and urban sounds with my field recorder... I always held it in the back of my mind that I wanted to create an honest

account of the reality of the journey I had been on the darkness and the light... and for it to be entertaining and a little bit different.

***D**id you collaborate on this one?*

I love to work collaboratively, simply because it is so much fun, and the dynamics stimulate new ideas. I had to do a lot of the initial recording myself but the mixing sessions with Rob Wilks at 123 studios were very interesting he was so helpful in designing and exploring my ideas for example the "Voice of Oneness" we tried lots of different things before settling on what you now hear. In real time the deep booming voice is my own, but we slowed it down using a Soundtoys plugin (which is a tool that can alter the pitch) and we then put it through a plate reverb which Rob has at his studio. We spent many sessions tweaking and balancing all the different instrument parts, field recordings and poems/parables, which Rob had to mix and merge, he showed incredible patience and is a very likeable character. My friend Alex did some wonderful detailed final editing, mixing, and mastering. He really homed in on the voice of God and gave it an extra dimension and clarity which really helped to make it all feel more complete

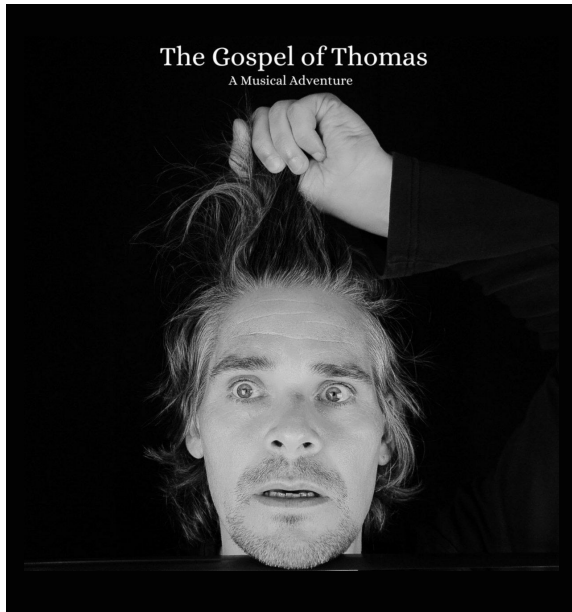




more cinematic. I would also like to mention my partner Annabel as a collaborator and companion. She has been brilliant with her suggestions, not to mention that she even accompanied me on some field recording trips having to get up at 4am to capture birdsong.

*The cover photography – you holding up your own head, seemingly dismembered, floating in a sea of black – it’s a striking image. How did you decide on that?*

I had a lot of ideas but limited resources. The



first parable in the “Gospel of Thomas” says ‘the kingdom of the beloved is like a man who intended to kill a powerful man he drew out his sword in his own house and stabbed into the wall to test his own strength and then he killed the powerful man.’ It suggests a fight with oneself and goes on to say later in the book that ‘two will lie down on one bed, one will live and the other will die’. This of course is metaphoric, and death symbolizes freedom speaking about this stuff is renowned for being difficult to communicate, I heard the author Thomas Merton say “When you are

reading a piece of spiritual text and you find yourself being inspired by what is being said stop reading and follow where it is taking you because that is the point of metaphor in spiritual language. I could also add this: when we read something very deep or true it is as if we are reminded of something we already know it’s not learning some new piece of information it’s like coming home but I would also like to add a quote from Tony Parsons the Author of the Open Secret: ‘The answer to life doesn’t exist on the next page of the latest spiritual book you are reading’ which resonated with me because that is exactly



what I had been doing...

Although it is a dramatic image that was inspired by Caravaggio’s “David with the head of Goliath” painting, I’m not sure what Caravaggio was trying to say with regards to his self-portrait in that painting, I just liked the idea of it and it seemed to resonate with the metaphors in the parables of the “Gospel of Thomas”. The decapitation on my cover is liberation but of course in reality decapitation doesn’t happen but there is a kind of death. My friend Richard Sylvester is the author of a book called ‘I hope you die



soon". This oxymoron is a blessing it's a friend hoping your suffering comes to an end soon. With that death comes the understanding that there is no-one that can do anything about any of it, this a very deep subject and as I've mentioned before renowned for being difficult to communicate. In the end I settled on this image because it's very striking and displays a range of emotions that the audience can question, interpret for themselves. For example, the black background is suggestive of the unknown and nothingness. What is beyond? We could argue that nobody alive truly knows or understands for sure. I heard professor Brian Cox say recently that, "what is going on out there in the universe particularly with regard to black holes is bonkers and it

will probably continue to get more bonkers in the future until in the end he will have very little to say about it all"... I just love that.

*The trailer was released a week before the music came out on Band Camp. A man wonders into an iconic church... is it the beginning of something?*

Yeah, as I have suggested above, I have attempted to write a screenplay that began life as a musical play. The genre I think would be very interesting for this piece would be modern dance, I feel there is a lot of potential for movement sequences here coupled with using a more abstract style of storytelling and emotion. The thing is, such projects require backing and it can be complicated getting things made that require a team of people budgets and a space to perform. I noticed recently that NETFLIX have an experimental genre available, and a short film called ANIMA by Thom Yorke and Paul Thomas Anderson was shown on this platform. So maybe there is hope. My story centres around a man (an actor) which is me because it's a semi- autobiographical piece ... who is disillusioned lost and frustrated, he stumbles across a bookshop in London one afternoon and buys a book he finds the authors contact details inside the book and decides to call the number and a relationship ensues similar to guru-disciple in the best possible way. Hans begins a journey of self-discovery through different realms time and space and ultimately faces his deepest fears ...

*That visceral laugh at the end of "Infants of Love" ...disturbing? Encouraging? Irreverent?*

I was that seeker in the parable who collapsed exhausted from my efforts to change my life. I'm sure many others like me have experienced something like that...the visceral laugh is absolutely encouraging, and I wholeheartedly

mean to be encouraging in the same way a friend would comfort and hug you... There is also a sense of total relief like an unwinding from a of tight coil or like gas coming out of a bottle ... at last!!! And with this relaxation comes humour as if a spell has been broken ... I'm very fond of the Dickens story 'Scrooge' I just love it that he wakes up on Christmas morning realises it was all a dream or visitation and embraces life with a newfound love and appreciation for it ... he has seen the error of his ways and is so thankful to be given another go at it.

*How would you compare the story in GOSPEL OF THOMAS to SAIL THE SEA? At first GOSPEL sounds like a love story, but as it progresses the "story" is self-exploration and the falling in love is with life.*

Yeah, SAIL THE SEA is a collection of the first songs I wrote in my twenties. THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS is a coming together of my understanding of drama and my passion for music which coincidentally merged with my personal search for meaning and answers to the big questions... it's a love story in the broadest sense and as you said 'falling in love with life' the only true love is unconditional love and it applies to every life in all areas it's not one thing or person it's everything including one's self.

*How did you feel about sharing the raw revelations inherent in this piece? "Building My Home in the Sand" is so honest, candid, vulnerable.*

Yeah, these songs are an honest account of my life and the struggle to deal with challenges, but as I have said before somewhere, light coming through the dark is so beautiful to me ... in story telling terms I think the audience has to feel what going on in a character what's

at stake for him or her... I felt it was important to be brutally honest considering the nature of the subject.

*What do you see ahead for "The Gospel of Thomas", your music, and your creative future?*

Well, these are unprecedented times and it's extremely difficult for artists to survive making a living I don't want to create a false impression that pursuing a creative life has been plain sailing and the truth is right

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now I can't get a job in the acting business and after nearly two years of doing endless audition tapes and having no success (some of these roles were just minor characters in mediocre TV dramas ) I am very close to having to study again to get a reasonable job to pay the rent. Who knows it might be an exciting change one door closes another one opens as they say? I'm uncertain about what is going to happen, but I still hope to live a creative and for-filling life regardless of how ugly the arts and social media platforms can be. I'm concerned that corporations like YOUTUBE are changing polices to suit them and exploiting small artists that live outside of the big number game by flooding adverts all over the content of their channels, something which has happened to me recently, of course they don't share any percentage of what they earn from this with the artists unless they have a certain following and fit the criteria, At a time when it's support that is needed for some of the worst hit by the pandemic it just seems like an out of touch and crazy



response to the situation. The question is how and where do you go to share your art in this modern era? These platforms have all the power and can change the rules to suit them at any given time. It's hard to think of what alternative ways of doing things might be. It's made me question what I'm striving for on these platforms, how long it can be sustained and even if I want anything to do with them. Unfortunately, the need to survive within the structures of society can contradict my views as an individual and an artist, because you

have to pay the bills. It's so frustrating that I feel at my best as a performer I've never had a better understanding of myself and the nature of creativity, but it appears there's simply not enough room in the industry for me right now. Having said all this I will conclude by saying, this is why it's so important for me to see and know that society and politics and the film business and all of it is just skin deep and it doesn't matter as much as it appears to, and no matter what is going on, my life circumstances is no reflection of what I am. Deep down everything is always okay. The peace beyond all understanding ... the perfect lover ... the friend ... these are words I've heard along the way that resonate with me, and that is what is so beautiful about the non-duality message because it points one away from pursuing or seeking answers and better circumstances in life, to a place beyond both good or bad. That's not to say that preferred circumstances maybe desirable but the idea that your absolute self depends on it is an illusion. It points you away from pursuit and towards what was and always will be right now ...

**THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS** is out now. You can find it on **BANDCAMP**, the most artist friendly resource, or **iTunes, Spotify, Amazon**, and wherever independent music can be found.



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