

TRANS-SIBERIAN ORCHESTRA



LETTERS
FROM THE
LABYRINTH

TIME & DISTANCE (THE DASH)

Time and distance
Placed before thee
Hope and beauty
Have we duties
As to what each moment's given for
Stars have made us wonder
Lightning wed to thunder
Power glory
Fragile stories
Woven through eternity

Time refines us
Death resigns us
And it's clever
For it never
Tells us when that moment is to be

All these questions of existence
We pursue with such persistence
What
Where
Why
When
Is the day we will see
And each child that is unborn yet
Must remember
Must remember

And the cost of all our human progress
Is a great debt
Is a great debt
And the journey so long ago begun
And the journey so long ago begun
Is not over till we're all saved
And our lives and God are one
Through the distance
Lord please stay close by our side
Through the distance
Lord please stay close by our ...

THE DASH

It was the last class of the first day of school. Singly and in pairs a group of fifteen-year-old students filed in, located seats, and awaited the start of their final class of the day, —History. Outside the first floor classroom, summer still tantalized and beckoned with her myriad of temptations.

When the last student sat down, the principal walked in and called for silence in a loud voice.

“Alright everyone, listen carefully. Your regular teacher, Mr. Pitrelli, will be out sick for a while. In a few minutes, your substitute teacher will arrive. I want absolutely no fooling around and you are to pay attention to everything he says and do everything he assigns you. If I hear of any trouble, you will regret it. I have to leave for a teachers’ conference now but do not forget what I said.”

With that the principal turned around and exited as swiftly as he had appeared, the door slamming behind him. As the sound of his footsteps faded, the door started to ever so slowly, edge open again. When the door was open enough, a man with long hair wearing a long black duster slipped halfway inside. Standing in the threshold, his eyes scanned the students and then peered outside the door in both directions down the empty halls. Then he stepped inside. Easing the door closed, he looked at the class and mysteriously said, “Okay, I think it’s safe.”

The man walked to the desk at the front of the classroom. But instead of sitting on the chair behind it, he sat on the front edge of the desk itself. The students watched in fascinated silence. They were not sure what was happening but it was definitely different. Different, always has the possibility of being interesting and interesting is a time-tested defense against one of the most dreaded of human conditions, especially dreaded by teenagers—boredom.

“Greetings, eager young minds. I will be your substitute teacher for the immediate future. I have been charged with giving you things to wonder about and also wonders to think about. Does anyone have any questions?” Not one student replied and there was half a minute of awkward silence. “By the way, I find this room extremely claustrophobic. If anyone agrees with me, will you please raise your hand?”

In the blink of an eye, every students’ hand shot in the air.

“Ah-ha, breakthrough! First contact has been achieved! Now how do I build on this momentum?” The teacher scratched his chin as he seemed to drift deep into thought. Then he exclaimed, “I’ve got it! No one can learn under such oppressive conditions. I say that we escape this dungeon we all have been lured into. Furthermore, through yon window, I spy a large old oak tree between this classroom and the athletic field. I sense that oak clearly sees you and beckons us to meet beneath the shade of her branches. I motion that we waste no more time and start our escape now. Does anyone second my motion?”

Numerous students quickly raised their hands in the air in agreement, until a

young girl named Amelia stood up and said. “Sir, I don’t think the principal will give us permission.”

“Unbelievable, a person thinking ahead. But permission, my dear child, only matters if . . . you ask for it. I motion we do not seek, inquire, nor request the aforementioned permission to move to a better learning environment. Instead, I suggest that we think outside the box. There are many roads to the same destination.”

The teacher walked over to one of the open first floor windows, placed both hands on the sill, and with an effortless grace, vaulted outside onto the grass. The students looked at each other in disbelief at their luck. Not only were they escaping this stifling classroom but their escape was instigated, sanctioned, and led by their new teacher. The students rushed to put their books in their knapsacks and rapidly followed him out the window.

By the time the last student had exited through the window, the teacher was already seated on the ground with his back resting against the large oak tree. One by one, the students gathered around him.

“Alright,” the teacher said when everyone seemed comfortable, “let’s have one of you pick the first question from History that you would like an answer to. Let’s start with something simple.”

Grant, a student in the back who had a bit of a reputation as the class clown, asked with an impish grin, “Sir, where can one find the meaning of life?” Several students burst into laughter.

“Ahh,” the substitute teacher, replied, “that my young man is a very good question. The . . .” Before he could continue, the school’s track team, practicing on the nearby running track, stopped and stared at the unusual gathering of students, until their coach ordered them to continue practicing their sprints.

“The answer to the meaning of every life is all in the dash,” the teacher replied.

“No disrespect, sir,” Amelia said, “but I have no idea what that means.”

“Just think about it and the meaning will appear crystal clear.”

“How will we know if we are right?”

“Trust me. You’ll know, and the minute you know, consider class dismissed and you can head home early. Oh, and to make it easier, I’ll give you a hint.” The teacher reached into his duster and took out a compass, which he handed to Amelia. “Since you seem to be the brains of this outfit, follow this compass north across the athletic field. The sooner you start the sooner you’ll figure it out.”

The teacher then headed back into the school and Grant said, “That is one strange puppy. Who carries a compass in their pocket?”

“At least he’s not boring. Now let’s get going so we can get out of here early,” Amelia said, looking at the compass and following it north across the field. The rest of the group followed, stopping for a moment to allow the track team to

cross their path.

"I got it!" Grant exclaimed. "The dash means the faster you get started in life, the sooner you'll discover what you are supposed to do."

"That can't be it," his friend Olivia said. "I've seen a lot of people who rushed through school to jump into a job that they hated and later felt trapped in. Keep walking, Grant."

At this point they were nearing the edge of the field and approaching a thinly treed patch of forest when one of the students asked, "What do we do now?"

"I can see the steeple of that old stone church on the other side of these trees," Amelia said. "Maybe he left a book with the answer inside. It's straight ahead north so let's keep walking."

As they walked out of the small grove of trees, they could see the old church about fifty meters away. But to get to it, they had to cut across an old cemetery filled with gravestones. Some were ornately carved while others were very plain, but all of them were weathered and worn, some for well over a century.

One of the students, who wanted to be an art major, noticed one of the stones had the name and date carved in unusually beautiful calligraphy. "Hey, guys!" she called out. "Could we stop a minute here? I have my etching pad and charcoal pencil and my father taught me a trick of putting a piece of paper against words carved in stone and no matter how worn down they were if you rub over them you will get an exact reproduction of the carving."

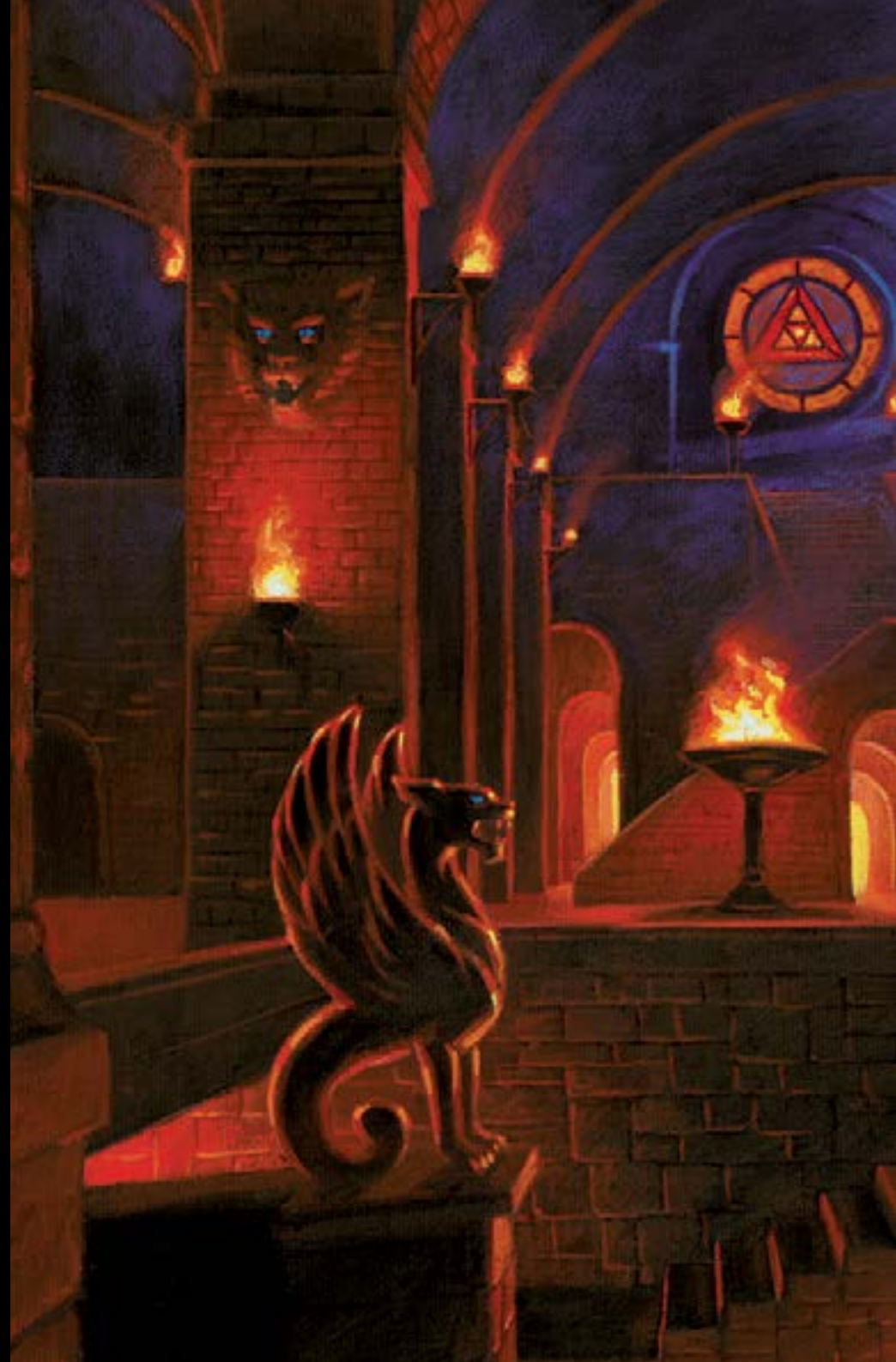
"Okay," Grant sighed. "But try not to take too long."

The others looked on as the girl carefully lined up the paper against the headstone and gently rubbed the charcoal over the weathered carving. When she was done, she carefully peeled it off and held it up for the others to see.

"Wow, that's pretty cool," Olivia said. "I can read the name and dates perfectly."

Suddenly, Andrew dropped his knapsack and exclaimed, "I've got it! Everyone has a name, a date we're born, and a date when we die. And when we are laid to rest they carve those dates into the stones or print them in newspapers but in-between those dates there is always a dash. The meaning of our lives has nothing to do with our name, or the day we're born, or when we die. It's all about what we do in the dash."

All the kids looked at each other and realized that Andrew had figured it out and together they all turned around and headed home.



MADNESS OF MEN

(INSTRUMENTAL)

PROMETHEUS

There comes a time to decide
There comes a time to choose sides
For in a world in the dark
A single thought is a spark

That ignites
And it burns
As it spread across the night
It detects
And protects
As its light it calls forth

Einstein and Edison
Tesla and Eddington
Prometheus was the one
That first showed us

How far minds could see
Changing destinies
Nothing has to be
If we wish it

There comes a time to decide
Do we unite or divide
And if the world's blind to sparks
To be the voice in the
Dark

MOUNTAIN LABYRINTH

(INSTRUMENTAL)


KING RURIK

(INSTRUMENTAL)

PRINCE IGOR

(INSTRUMENTAL)



A church with a full moon in the sky. A plume of smoke rises from a tomb in the foreground.

RURIK, THE FIRST KING OF RUSSIA
WHO UNITED AND BROUGHT PEACE
AND PROSPERITY TO THE SLAVIC TRIBES
THAT INHABIT THIS GREAT LAND.

Rurik lies in a tomb, wearing a crown and armor. The name "RURIK" is carved on the tombstone.

HIS SPIRIT ARISES.

Rurik stands before a tomb with the name "RURIK" on it. He is wearing armor and a cape.

THE KING FOLLOWS THE
SMOKE TOWARD THE SQUARE.





RURIK IS SHOCKED TO SEE SOLDIERS KEEPING SHIVERING MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN FROM ENTERING THE SAFETY AND WARMTH OF THE LARGE CAPITAL BUILDING.



WHAT IS THIS? WHY IS THIS? THIS IS NOT HOW KNIGHTS ACT. THE STRONG HAVE A DUTY TO PROTECT THE WEAK.



RURIK'S GAZE IS DRAWN TO A MAN HIGH UP IN A WINDOW...



...HOLDING WHAT APPEARS TO BE A CROSSBOW LIKE WEAPON.



RURIK ASCENDS TO THE UPPER ROOM. A COMMANDER SHOUTS ORDERS TO THE SOLDIER AT THE WINDOW.





CONFUSED!
WHAT IS THIS?



SUDDENLY -
AN EAR SPLITTING SOUND!

THE YOUNG MAN
IN THE SQUARE FALLS DEAD,
HIS BLOOD STREAMING
INTO THE SNOW
THAT CUSHIONED HIS FALL.



NO!

RURIK WONDERS
WHO CONTROLS THESE STRINGS
THAT MANIPULATE THIS MAN
TO BE SO EVIL.

AND WHAT IS THIS OBJECT
FROM WHICH HE HEARS...





...A DISEMBODIED VOICE ISSUING
COMMANDS OF DEATH?



RURIK REALIZES
THE PUPPET MASTER
IS NOT HUMAN...



AND SUMMONS THE SPIRIT
TO REVEAL ITSELF!



I
KNOW
you!

I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DESPITE THE
CENTURIES THAT HAVE PASSED.
THE DARKNESS AND SHADOWS DO
NOT DISGUISE WHAT YOU ARE.

YOU ARE HATE!

YOU ARE THE DIVIDER OF HUMANITY --
DESTROYER OF KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM,
PROGRESS AND PEACE. YOU DESTROY
FOR YOU CANNOT BUILD. YOU TURN
US INTO... US AND THEM. YOU DIVIDE
PEOPLE AGAINST PEOPLE, BROTHER
AGAINST BROTHER, FATHER AGAINST
SON. YOU BLIND HUMANS EVEN
THOUGH THEIR EYES STILL SEE.
YOU MAKE THEM DEAF THOUGH
THEIR EARS STILL HEAR.

WHERE THERE IS TRUST
YOU SOW DOUBT.

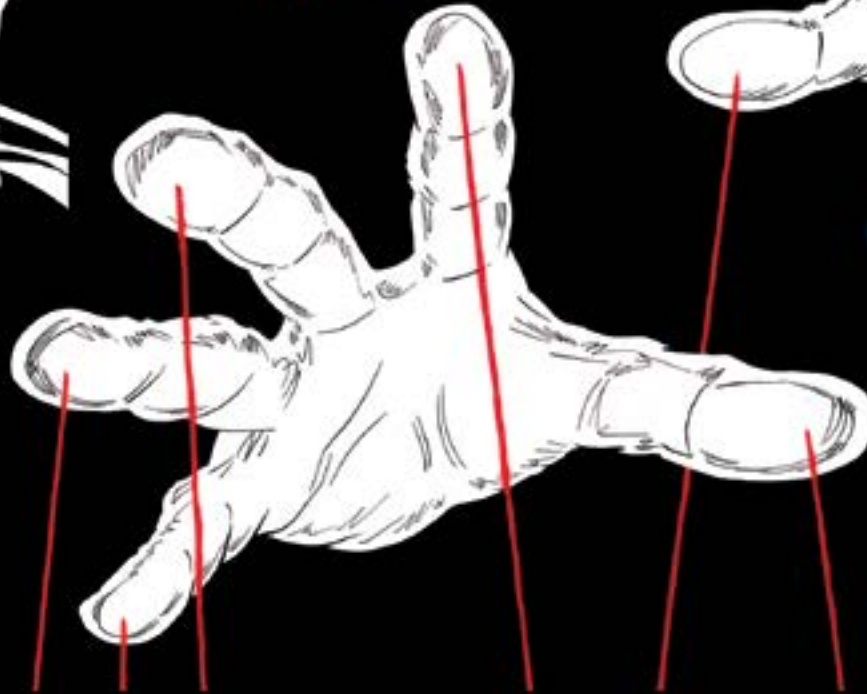




I AM HATE.
THROUGH MY STRINGS
I PULL THE SEEDS OF ENVY,
GREED, FEAR, AND MISTRUST
INTO HUMAN SOULS.

I AM EVER PATIENT. I WILL ONLY
BE SATIATED BY HUMANITY'S
DEMISE!

I FEAR
NOTHING!





I SEVER
THESE
STRINGS OF
HATE!



YOU FEAR HUMANITY. YOU FEAR THOSE
OF COMPASSION AND GOODWILL.
YOU FEAR MEN WHO ARE THEIR BROTHER'S KEEPER.
YOU FEAR THOSE WHO LOVE THEIR ENEMY.
YOU FEAR THEM FOR THOUGH YOU MAY BE
EVER PATIENT, THEY AND THEIR CHILDREN
WILL BE EVER VIGILANT.

AND IN THE END...

YOU WILL
LOSE.

AWAKEN MY CHILDREN...
NO MORE HATE!





THE NIGHT CONCEIVES

The sun goes down
The light it leaves
The mind can't imagine
What the night conceives

The siren wails
She flirts, she calls
Promises nothing
But she offers all

She's the chambered round
In the magazine
She's the first one out
But the exit's clean

When she first walks by
You feel drained and bled
With those arctic eyes
She looked at me and said

She said

Oh yeah

When she appears

Always center stage
But when the spotlight comes
You know she'll disengage

With a feline smile
And a wink that's sin
Can't say where she goes
Only where she's been

She's the chambered round
In the magazine
She's the first one out
But the exits clean
She's got arctic eyes
She's Electra Glide
The night bets on her
And you just let it ride

The wheel keeps turnin'
My mind keeps learnin'
The night still burnin'

Let it ride

The dawn is close
The dark retreats
The world's still here

The heart still beats

Time goes on
The Earth still turns
And with the night
She will return

She's the chambered round
In the magazine
She's the first one out
But the exit's clean

When she first walks by
You feel drained and bled
With those arctic eyes
She looked at me and said

The dice keep earning
They keep returning

FORGET ABOUT THE BLAME

I wasn't sure what you were thinking
I saw a distance in your eyes
The passion we once had is fading
Into the whirlwind of our lives

But you sit right there
Like you don't care
If we try real hard
We'll get somewhere 'cause

It's all about the lovin'
It's not about the pain
Tell me what your heart says
Forget about the blame

It's all about the lovin'
It's not about the pain
Tell me what your heart says
Forget about the blame

Forget about the blame

If love is strong then we will make it
The burned out flame we can relight
There's nothing I can do
I'm now a part of you and
I can't take living separate lives

But you sit right there
Like you don't care
And you tell me that your life's not fair

But we all have our own cross to bear

It's all about the lovin'
It's not about the pain
Tell me what your heart says
Forget about the blame

It's all about the lovin'
It's not about the pain
Tell me what your heart says
Forget about the blame

It's all for the love
It's all for the love
It's all for the love
It's not about the pain

Our two hearts beat the same
Forget the blame
It's all for love
It's not for pain
Forget the blame

It's all about the lovin'
It's not about the pain
Just tell me what your heart says
Forget about the blame

It's all about the lovin'
It's not about the pain
Tell me what your heart says
Forget about the blame

It's all about the lovin'
It's not about the pain
Tell me what your heart says
Forget about the blame

Forget about the blame
Forget about the blame
Forget about the blame

NOT DEAD YET

Cold cash
Quick dash
Don't have nothing else I can say

Cops come
Can't run
Lawyers just gotta delay

What crime?

Sunshine

Can't be anything that I did

I was used

So confused

Debts would mount

Couldn't count

But I never did nothing I hid

Gotta just lay low

Time is on my side

Let the clocks roll on

Say I can't decide

Let the clocks roll on

I have no regrets

Let the clocks roll on

Let the clocks roll on

Let the clocks roll on

'Cause I'm not dead yet

Wild child

Nice style

Fashion is whatever you wear

No sin

Begins

Understanding who really cares

It's free

With a small fee

When words don't mean what they say

Call them out

Let 'em doubt

Let 'em sweat

With regret

That their game, you'll no longer play

Gotta just lay low

Time is on my side

Let the clocks roll on

Say I can't decide

Let the clocks roll on

I have no regrets

Let the clocks roll on

Let the clocks roll on

Let the clocks roll on

'Cause I'm not dead yet

PAST TOMORROW

Last night dreamt I was falling

A new born through the years

Long before I knew sorrow
Long before I knew fear

I tried not to awaken
Clung to this childhood's sleep
Afraid all might be taken
But sleep like childhoods cease

Childhoods cease

A street of all illusions
That were so real to me
But are they true illusions
If they are all you see

The stars keep all our secrets
Safe in the night they dwell
And after time eternal
They all still listen well

Where our hopes had somehow grown
Something I had never known
Somehow they had crossed the dark unno-
ticed

Far enough to wish upon
Then return and carry on

Stars will whisper to the night
Behold this

Life is real
But so are ghosts
Side by side
Along times coast
And to others
We walk on unnoticed

Eternity
Itself has shores
We will meet
Again once more
Of all there is
To learn in life
Please know this

Childhoods cease...

Childhoods cease...
I will be there...

Childhoods cease...
I will be there...

Childhood sees

STAY

Hey child
Out on your own
You never looked back
Never called home
You never turned 'round
Tell me the games that you played

Night time
Wander the street
You never give ground
Never retreat
You're always Oz bound
Have all the dreams been betrayed

Stay
Here where the dreams tend to stray
Here you're safe

When the night
Fades away
When the night
Fades away

Hey there

Oz refugee
You took the wrong road
Hatters and tea
Are all that you found
Out on the great white way

Times change
You never did
Life came
You overbid
Join us
Vessels of courvoisier

Stay
Here where the dreams tend to stray
Here you're safe

When the night
Fades away
When the night
Fades away

Aahhh

NOT THE SAME

I heard a note

In the dark
Where it slipped into my mind
And somehow still remains

Time comes and goes
Ebbs and flows
And somehow that single note
Still rings on and sustains

For I need someone
Not just anyone
For when all is said and done
Anyone
Anyone
Else
Is not the same

There was a soul in the dark
And it flies across the night
Towards a far distant flame

Cross forest and streets, every beat
Keeps it moving towards a goal
It may never obtain

For it needs someone
Not just anyone

For when all is said and done
Anyone
Anyone
Else
Is not the same

You were the hope that I kept
Secretly inside and by
My whole life it was framed

Some never saw or suspected
That it was there and I
All alone knew your name

For we need someone
Not just anyone
For when all is said and done
Anyone
Anyone
Else
Is not the same

WHO I AM

All these days that lay before me
All these days that lay behind
Does time just go on forever

Whose decision
Whose design
Death life
Wrong right
Pray will you tell me
Who decides

Dark night
Days light
Pray will you tell me
Who divides

Every year contains its seasons
Summer, winter, spring and fall
Some pass faster than the others
Some forgotten some recalled

Long short
Owned bought
Gathering trinkets
From times tides

Rich thoughts
Lost sought
Still the clock turns
And can't be bribed

I know
I see
I hear
Do you understand

The cost
In years
In tears
The weight of the damned

That build
To lakes
Then wake
And flood cross the land

We watch
The waves
Carve out
Their pre-ordained plans
Each life
Each grave
And then
Fill each one with sand

Listen what I say
Time does not betray
Every moment cast

Guaranteed to pass

Every moment close
Soon to turn to ghost
Some to disappear
Others shadows clear

Shadows without light
Soon become just night
Leaving in our mind
What is left behind

Do you hear what I say
Every life's numbered days
Joined with hourglass sand
Feel it run through your hands

Still then no one knows now
The true why when and how
And when time's out of sand
Will they know who I...
Am

THE DREAMS OF FIREFLIES

WHEN DOES A DANCE BECOME A BALLET?
WHEN DO WORDS BECOME A PLAY?
WHEN DOES THE DAY BECOME THE NIGHT
BEFORE OR AFTER THE LAST MOMENT OF LIGHT?
FOR WHAT IS THE DAY BUT A BRIDGE TO TOMORROW
AND THE DAY BUT A BRIDGE TO THE NIGHT
THEY EXIST SIDE BY SIDE IN THEIR ETERNAL RIDE
WHILE THEY CAREFULLY KEEP EACH OTHER IN SIGHT

It was late in the season of a sweltering city summer as an old man sat on a stoop leading to a rundown tenement. He had lived on this street, in this building, his entire life. As a child he had played countless games of tag, stickball, and hide-&-seek on this block. It was to this building that he had brought his beloved wife, long since passed away, and carried her across the threshold. They had never been fortunate enough to have children of their own, but that had never bothered them because they considered every child who lived on this street as theirs. When a parent had to go somewhere, they happily babysat, and if a child scraped a knee they would bandage it.

Any child who had fallen behind in their schoolwork or had trouble understanding a certain subject knew that on this block they had a secret weapon. For you see, the man's wife had been a teacher during the week and on weekends any kid that needed help just had to knock on their door and she would spend whatever amount of time it took for the academic challenge to be triumphantly conquered.

He loved the look of change in those children's eyes—from nervous, embarrassment, bordering on shame, when they first knocked on the door to a new found confidence as they headed back to school the following Monday, certain they would pass any test on the once feared subject. He used to joke with the children that his wife was secretly a princess from “The Kingdom of Knowledge and Wisdom” where all subjects were respected but none were feared, especially when they were understood. In the early years of his marriage the children addressed him as Mister Joseph. But as time went by it affectionately became Mister Joe.

The block was a family—what census takers would have called lower working class. No one was rich, but no one was hungry. All the kids played together, occasionally arguing or fighting, but always managing to settle their differences before their parents called them in for dinner. Everyone looked out for everyone else, even strangers. If someone wandered into their neighborhood and did not know where the subway or bus stop was, not only would they be given directions, but if the neighbor had the time or the lost person was elderly

they would walk them there.

But that was decades ago and the neighborhood had changed. The block across the street had been torn down. The new buildings promised had never been built and the dirty lot over the years became a dumping ground for garbage of every sort. Old car parts, refrigerators, tires, pipes, anything a disreputable company did not feel like paying to be hauled away. For a while the children used it as a playground. But when a young boy got severely hurt one year, the city built a high plywood wall around it to keep the kids out and to prevent further dumping. Within months the plywood walls were covered with graffiti and the children returned to playing in the street.

One reason that the block had been leveled was that a group of young men had been using it as a place to sell drugs; but instead of conducting their illegal business behind brick walls, in dingy hallways or apartments, they now did it outside in the open. At first, it was just a few older teenagers who would appear in the late afternoon, slouching against the plywood wall and talking while waiting for their customers. By midnight they would usually be gone.

Over time the numbers of dealers and hours they spent there grew. Little by little, they would gather earlier and disperse later, until eventually they were there twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. And not only did their numbers grow, they diversified, both the sellers and buyers of these drugs; drugs that did not heal but instead artificially and temporarily numbed the mind. “the human mind,” that amazing cluster of cells and neurons designed to solve any problem humanity encounters, from the simplest to the most complicated by using God's ultimate gift to humanity, common sense and reason tempered by compassion.

At first individuals buy their drug of choice and take it to use in private. Eventually, however, most people cease caring where they are or who else is around. And not caring can sometimes, in the short term, feel good. But when the drugs wear off, and they always do, you still have the same problems you had before. So you take some more and discover to your frustration that you need even more just to have the same effect. Eventually you realize you are caught in a downward spiral that leads to you taking more and more just to feel normal or even worse, to not feel at all.

As the old man sat gazing at his street, he wondered how it could have changed so drastically. Not just the buildings but the people and most importantly the children. He was not a college educated philosopher but he instinctively realized that if you lose the children you lose the future, and if you save the children you save the world. His wife had always nurtured that sense of wonderment, curiosity and optimism every child is born with but the children before him now seemed to have lost.

But the children on this street no longer ran around playing stickball or tag. They no longer imagined they were fearless astronauts in rockets made from empty boxes. Instead they slouched against the wall in imitation of the drug

dealers and their clients, watching them gamble away their money at dice or cards. The closest thing these children had to the games he had played as a child was when they played a game called “Cops and Dealers.” it was a twisted version of “Cops and Robbers” where the cops were the bad guys and the drug dealers who got away with it were the winners. The only real exercise these children had was when they performed errands for the dealers, such as running to the local deli.

Suddenly, the old man noticed two eight-year-old kids, a boy and a girl. The little girl he recognized. Her name was Tanya and she was the granddaughter of an old friend. He had known her mother since the day she was born and knew that she was raising the child on her own while working two jobs. No one had any idea who or where the father was.

The children were returning from the corner deli with a pack of beer and a carton of cigarettes, which they handed to one of the dealers across the street. “Did anyone see you take it?” the young man asked the boy.

“No,” the boy answered proudly. “She pretended she fell and while the owner was helping her I grabbed the stuff and ran. He probably hasn’t even noticed it’s gone yet.”

“Good job kids,” he laughed. Setting the beer and cigarettes on the sidewalk he handed them each a couple of bills. “Do this enough boy and soon you’ll be able to buy those expensive sneakers you been wanting and you girl can get that high-end lipstick you see all the models wearing.”

Before the children could pocket the money, it was snatched from their grasp by an arthritic, veined hand. “What are you doing teaching these kids to steal?” the old man demanded.

The atmosphere on the street went through a series of rapid transformations. The dealer’s associates started to move toward the old man. The children froze, a look of confusion and uncertainty in their eyes. The adult residents on the block, not wanting to get involved, started to back away slowly, but the old man refused to move.

The young dealer looked down at this neighborhood elder who dared to question him and in a voice more bemused than angry said, “I know you. You’re the old geezer they call Mister Joe. What you talking about, geezer? I didn’t see any stealing.” looking about he asked, in a loud voice, “Anyone here see any stealing?”

His friends smirked and a series of, “No,” “Not me,” and “I didn’t see nothing,” rippled through his confederates. The other adults just stared at the ground as they continued to back away. The kids stood still, watching the adults, a nervousness bordering on fear growing in their eyes.

“They didn’t see nothing because you and your group of thugs are too cowardly to do your own thievery,” the old man continued, refusing to back down even as the younger man and his associates stepped menacingly closer towards him.

“And not only are you stealing from that poor deli owner, you’re robbing these kids of their childhood and all the magic that childhood imagination can conjure.”

“Magic? Magic?” the young man retorted, snatching the bills out of the old man’s hand and throwing it back in his face. “Who has the money on this block? I do. Who does everyone respect on this block? Me.”

“You’re confusing respect with fear.” Mister Joe fired back. The drug dealer rolled his eyes and without warning slapped the old man so hard that he fell to the ground, tore his shirt open, and cut his lip as he hit the concrete.

“Hey old man, what are you doing laying on the sidewalk blocking traffic? And your shirt’s filthy, an embarrassment to the neighborhood. Here let me help you clean it up a little,” the dealer taunted, cracking open a can of beer and pouring it over him. “Now get your sorry ass home before you annoy me anymore.”

With the snickering of the dealer’s minions echoing around him, Mister Joe struggled to his feet while trying to maintain his dignity. His eyes looked sad, lost and confused as he brushed the beer-soaked dirt off his face and hair, pulling his ripped shirt together as best he could before slowly re-crossing the street to return to his apartment.

Tanya, one of the kids he was speaking up for moved toward him to help but the other kids stopped her. The dealer noticed Tanya’s gesture and walked up to her, “Pay him no mind, kid. He’s just an old geezer who should have died a long time ago. Ain’t no use to anybody. Here,” he said handing her a couple of bills, “Go get yourself some lipstick or makeup.”

“But I’m only eight,” she protested. Something in her heart made her feel that if she took the money, it would look like she approved of what he had just done.

“Never too early to start wearing makeup” the dealer replied, with a “Trust me, I know” confidence in his voice.

“I have to ask my mom.”

“Your mom won’t know, so your mom won’t care. Take it.”

“Take it. Take it,” the other kids said.

“If she don’t want it, I do, another little boy chimed in.”

Looking around at her friend, the girl slowly took the money, turned, and ran. The other kids followed her, hoping to get a share of the loot.

“Money, the only magic,” the dealer triumphantly proclaimed. Turning to his underlings, he announced, “All right, enough amusement! Back to work! We got old customers to serve and new ones to find.”

A car turned the corner and braked as it approached him. “What you want? What you need?” one of the dealer’s teenage runners asked the approaching vehicle’s occupant. The dealer leaned against the wall and smiled as his little world one of his own making, now returned to normal.

Well, nearly normal. For no one ever saw Mister Joe in the daylight anymore. Instead, he would come out after dark, when the traffic had died down. He would cross the street and grab one of the sheets of plywood that surrounded the demolished block, pulling at it with all his strength till it opened slightly, allowing him to slip inside. He would eventually re-emerge, sometimes minutes sometimes hours, dragging various pieces of discarded junk behind him. The items varied from old car parts, refrigerator coils, rusted bed frames, and anything else that had been dumped in the field before the city had boarded it up.

Mister Joe would then disappear from the block until the next morning when he would re-appear, carrying or lugging old rotting logs behind him, which he piled up in the alley behind his building near the garbage cans. The other tenants gave him his space, for though they felt sorry for him some were still afraid that it would anger the thugs on the corner if they talked to him. The few that were not afraid, including the children, also did not talk to him because they felt it would only do more harm by reminding him of his humiliation.

Everyone who saw Mister Joe as the months went by started to believe he was losing his mind. Why did he disappear every night from the neighborhood, struggling to carry his worthless garbage to some unknown place? Why was he stashing this growing pile of rotting trees in the alley? The building did not have any fireplaces but the old man seemed to find comfort in building his mound of old firewood, so no one, not even the landlord complained.

The corner drug dealers thought that this change in the old man was hilarious and started to call him “Joe Junk” or “Mister Garbage.” sometimes when they were particularly bored, they would surround him and knock whatever he was carrying out of his hands, trying to get a reaction out of him. But Mister Joe never lost his temper, never said a word. He just picked up his items and continued on his way.

Realizing that they were never going to rile him, the young men eventually tired of their game and settled for just taunting him from across the street, especially if they had any kind of audience. And so it went on, day after day, week after week, month after month.

Summer passed as summers are known to do and graciously gave way to, autumn. Then autumn, always dependable and ever the gentleman, used his artistic skill to prepare the world for winter. Regal, majestic winter, who reigned supreme until she felt the warmth of late April’s sun slowly melting her blankets of snow, which was her sign to give birth to her child, spring, along with all the hope that the birth of every child brings.

When winter heard the sound of the first sparrow, she realized that she had finished her annual mission and together with the other seasons had faithfully fulfilled their yearly cycle. Happy and content she fell into a deep sleep leaving the Earth to her fellow seasons until after many months, autumn, would awaken her from her slumber to once again conjure her magic while the other

seasons rested. Meanwhile spring set about his work, thawing frozen ground, changing icy winds into warm gentle breezes, all to prepare the world for the return of summer.

Summer, who can effortlessly change glaciers into flowing rivers, provide food and warmth for countless migrating animals and birds, and coax hibernating creatures out of their shelters and into the welcoming arms her warm days. And the same was true of Mister Joe’s city block. The drug dealers took up their usual spot on the corner, the children returned to playing in the streets, and the traffic increased steadily as strangers from outside drove in to buy their drug of choice.

Everything appeared exactly as it had the previous summer except for Mister Joe. He had once been the wise old man that everyone sought for advice. But after witnessing his eccentric behavior hauling useless junk in and out of the neighborhood, even the kids believed that the incident with the dealer had been so traumatic that he had lost his mind. Not only did he not react to the taunting of the drug dealer and his parroting toadies but he no longer acknowledged greetings from old friends. He just looked at the ground as he continued his daily ritual of lugging useless items into and out of the block.

Late that summer evening, twilight was laying down its red carpet for night’s descent from the stars. The children were running around and the street was quiet. Mister Joe looked out the front door of his building and, seeing no dealers, cautiously crossed the street. He approached the loose piece of plywood that he used to slip into and out of the vacant lot. It was the first time since the confrontation the previous summer that he had crossed the street before dark. He felt safer in the dark and this street was darker than most because the dealers had shot all the street lamps to make it harder for the police to witness their activities.

Tanya, who had been talking to her friends near that same spot, looked up and a huge smile lit her face. “Mister Joe,” she shouted excitedly, “It is so good to see you. You know everyone misses you.”

Startled by her voice he dropped what he had been carrying, a well decayed piece of tree trunk about a meter long. When he saw the source of the voice for the first time since last summer he smiled and said, “It is so good to see you, little one.”

“I didn’t mean to make you drop your firewood,” Tanya replied apologetically. Then, eagerly nodding towards the other kids nearby, she said, “It must be heavy. I can help you carry it and i’m sure my friends can help too.”

“I appreciate your offer but it is too late for children to be out after dark. Your moms must be worried about you.”

“We might get in a little trouble, but when we tell her that we were helping you it won’t be so bad. She likes you. She says you are a good man.”

“Really! Well that was very kind of her. Did you know that I knew her when

she was your age? And I think the best way to keep her thinking such kind thoughts is to get you kids home. But if you would like to, maybe you could help me tomorrow night. I'll meet you right here at sunset. Your friends can come and help too if they would like."

"Why can we come tomorrow after dark and not tonight?"

"Because, tomorrow is saturday and your mom can come also to make sure you get home safe."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

"What if I'm late?"

"I'll wait."

"What if I'm really late?"

"I'll wait. Besides, look! Someone dumped an old sofa right here in front of this wall so i'll be comfortable. Also, child, always remember, how long you wait is not as important as who you are waiting for. And trust me the surprise I have for you and your friends, I think you are going to love."

Before she could answer, an angry voice erupted from across the street. The voice screaming at him was the dealer who had been making a drug transaction with some men in a dark sedan that was hidden in the shadows on the corner. Running across the street followed by his friends he got in the old man's face and screamed, "Hey, crazy geezer, what you doing on my spot? What are you even doing on my side of the street? I'm going to give you the beating now I should have done last year."

But before he could grab the old man, Tanya planted herself firmly in between the dealer and Mister Joe. "Leave him alone. He isn't bothering anyone. You are bigger than him and if you hurt him that makes you a coward."

Apartment lights started coming on. People started to look out their windows. The dealer was beginning to feel a little uncomfortable. "That so, little lady? To me a coward is someone that puts a child between himself and danger."

Before anyone could reply, angry voices emerged from the sedan. "Hey, punk you got our money, now where's our merchandise?" the driver shouted.

The dealer realized that in his anger he had forgotten to complete the transaction. But not wanting to lose face in front of his men, he screamed back, "Shut your mouth punk before me and mine go slit your throats."

The driver didn't answer but instead shifted the car into drive and sped full speed at the dealer and his gang. Panicking, the dealers shoved each other out of the way as they dove for cover. No one thinking of the little girl who was frozen in fear in front of the wall. The car slammed into the wall and blood splattered upon the windshield. As the sedan's engine died, all the doors flew open and the occupants fled on foot. The dark sedan was quickly surrounded

by neighbors and within a minute, two police cars and an ambulance were on the scene.

"What happened?" the first officer asked.

A middle-aged woman said, "I saw it all from my window! Some men were arguing and then this car drove on to the sidewalk. It happened so fast and it was so dark. I think they hit a little girl. That is why they all ran away!"

"Where is the child?" the officer asked.

Before anyone could answer, a paramedic grabbed a flashlight and looked beneath the car. He was quickly joined by his partner, several other police, and neighbors.

"Hey Tyrel," one of the paramedics called out. "I see her".

"Where? I don't see anything," his partner Brian replied.

"Where, beneath that old sofa cushion under the engine. She's pinned beneath it. I can see her foot. She's not moving. There's blood everywhere."

"I'll get a jack," a policeman offered.

"No time," the paramedic replied. "if she is still alive she's bleeding out. Get everyone who can grab beneath the car and lift. The second it's high enough, I'll slide her out."

When the officer turned to the crowd to ask for the help, he saw that they were already securing a grip on every possible section of the car. The ranking police officer nodded and as one they lifted with all their strength. Muscles strained and veins bulged until the vehicle lifted. Finally the paramedic shouted in triumph, "I got her!" he slid the girl out from beneath the car to his waiting partner who immediately started examining her on a waiting stretcher board.

The crowd lowered the car as the other paramedic rolled out and then gathered in a circle a respectful distance giving the paramedics room to do their work. The girl was still not moving but she was breathing. Suddenly a cry of tortured anguish pierced the night.

"Tanya!" the girl's mother cried, rushing to her child. Upon hearing her mother's voice Tanya's eyes fluttered open and she slowly sat up. As mother and child embraced a cheer erupted from the crowd.

"Is she going to be okay?" her mother queried the paramedic who was still wiping the blood from her face.

"I think so ma'am. No broken bones. A lot of blood on her face but there are only a few small cuts. She is a very lucky little girl. That old discarded sofa must have absorbed most of the impact and protected her from any serious harm. She..."

Before the paramedic could continue, Tanya cut him off. "It wasn't the sofa, it was Mister Joe! When I saw the car coming I was too scared to move. Mister Joe grabbed me and dropped us to the ground. That's all I remember until I

heard your voice.”

“Wait child. Wait, Mister Joe was hit by the car?” Tanya’s mother asked.

“Yes, mom.”

“Tyrel did you see anyone else under the car?” Brian asked his partner.

“No, the old cushion she was pinned under... oh my God.” rushing back under the car with flashlight in hand, the paramedics re-emerged sixty seconds later cradling the limp body of the old man, who was blood soaked beyond recognition. Gently placing him in a waiting gurney, the medics closed the door and sped towards the hospital.

As the sound of the sirens faded, everyone gathered around Tanya who was tightly clutching her mother. Even the drug dealers hung on the fringes, but no one seemed afraid of them anymore. Instead they looked at them with disdain. The dealers’ eyes, instead of their usual arrogance, reflected a look of shame.

“Is Mister Joe going to be alright, Officer?” Tanya asked tears starting to well in her eyes.

“I’m sure the doctors are doing the best that they can, child,” the police officer said reassuringly. Then, in an effort to distract her from what she had just experienced, another officer asked for her help in trying to piece together what had occurred.

Her mother gave her a reassuring nod.

“I saw Mister Joe trying to drag an old log through a crack in those boards.”

“Why was he doing that, sweetheart?” the officer asked.

“I don’t know,” Tanya replied. “but he said that if me, my friends, and my mom met him here tomorrow night he’d have a surprise for us.”

“What kind of surprise?” the officer asked.

“I don’t know. He never got to tell me.”

As they were talking, a tow truck arrived to remove the wrecked car that was embedded in the wall. Hooking a chain to its back bumper, the driver returned to his truck and pulled the car out. But the sedan was so wedged into the plywood that the extraction caused an entire section of the wall to collapse.

Silence descended on the crowd as everyone, young, old, and even the police, stood and stared at what the collapsing wall had revealed. Before them, in what had once been a garbage strewn lot, was a scene that looked like it had transported from a fairytale kingdom into the middle of this blighted area of the city. Rather than mounds of trash, broken appliances, and vermin, there was a perfect field with prairie grass a foot tall highlighted by wildflowers all gently swaying in the summer breeze. But the most magical part of all were the countless fireflies, seemingly millions of them, hovering over the entire scene, their lights flashing coded messages that only children can read.

Suddenly, the spell was broken by the crackling of one of the officer’s radios. The officer turned to the crowd.

“Mister Joe was pretty banged up, but it looks like he’s going to be all right,” he announced. “He’ll be in the hospital for a while, but he’s asking the police to pull down the wall around the old lot since he promised a surprise for the kids.

At that cheerful news, every adult that was able ran toward the wall and pulled it down piece by piece. As the news spread through the neighborhood, the field was flooded with kids, laughing, playing tag, and capturing fireflies then releasing them back into the night.

“Wow,” said one of the officers, “that is some old man. Ten years on the beat and I’ve never seen anything like this.”

“Fifteen years on the beat and I think this is as good as it gets. Let’s get out of here. I got to tell my wife and kids about this.”

The police car and ambulance pulled away and the children played till dawn when they went home and fell asleep to dreams of fireflies.

THE END

AFTER THE END

It was four weeks later and Mister Joe was sitting on the steps watching the kids play. He was still a little sore from his accident and had been back for several days. But he still could not believe the change in the neighborhood. The street was clean and while he was away someone had renovated his apartment, putting up new drywall, replacing the electric, and fixing the plumbing. When he asked who had done the work and paid for it so he could thank them, all anyone would say was that a local renovator who wished to remain anonymous had simply shown up one day. Still, Mister Joe could be a very persistent man. Finally, the deli owner told him that the leader of the renovation would be coming at 9 PM.

Mister Joe was slightly surprised when a nicely dressed young man with a well-trimmed beard and glasses walked up to him and said, “sir, would you mind if I joined you for a minute?”

“No, please do. It’s relaxing to watch kids being kids. But forgive me if I may have to leave shortly. You see, I am waiting for someone who I owe a debt of thanks to.”

“Is that individual arriving at nine?”

“Yes, how would you know?”

“Because he has arrived a little early and it is actually he that owes you a debt.”
Mister Joe, carefully looked at the man’s face and then said slowly, “you are the drug dealer.”

“Was the drug dealer, sir. I will never return to that past, only try to amend it.”

“I didn’t recognize you with your new clothes.”

“My mother taught me that first impressions are important and my father taught me carpentry and plumbing. Said that a man with those skills and a good work ethic would always be all right. Funny thing is I actually like it. Take something run down, broken, and make it like new both inside and out. When you’re done and you look at the change and you think I did that, it feels good.”

“Do you miss your old...job?”

“Surprisingly, not at all. Money is a little less, but not always looking over your shoulder and sleeping better more than makes up for it. Today I fixed the leaking roof on a scientist’s house. He showed me a model of a new space telescope he’s working on so people could better see the stars. It was pretty interesting and I told him I could never have built something like that. I told him that I loved science in school but didn’t seem to have talent for it. He laughed and told me he loved sleeping beneath a roof that didn’t leak but whenever he hit a nail it bent in half.

“You were the one who renovated my apartment.”

“Yes, it was the least I could do after the way I treated you and even more because you saved Tanya.”

“Well, young man, we all make mistakes in our youth and as for Tanya, you owe me nothing. I was there and I feel as if she was my own daughter, if you know what I mean.”

“More than you realize.”

“Why is that?”

“Well, no one else knows this except her mother, but she is my daughter. When that car was heading towards her I ran the other way, you ran towards her. I nearly destroyed her childhood and you moved mountains to bring it back.”

“Life is most definitely an interesting adventure. Have you told Tanya that you are her father?”

“No, sir. I don’t think I’ve earned that right yet but I’m working on it.”

“Mister Joe!” Tanya called from across the street. “We’re catching and releasing fireflies! Want to play?”

“Can I bring my friend?”

“Sure, but tell him to be careful, fireflies are delicate.”

“I think he knows, Tanya.”

The two men crossed the street together, side by side.

LULLABY NIGHT

(INSTRUMENTAL)

PRODUCED BY PAUL O'NEILL

Co-Produced By **Dave Wittman**
Recording And Mix Engineer **Dave Wittman**

Assistant Engineer **BJ Ramone**
Additional Assistant Engineer **Jon Tucker**

THE BAND:

Paul O'Neill: Guitars

Jon Oliva: Keyboards , Guitar,
Bass

Al Pitrelli: Lead, Rhythm Guitars

Luci Butler: Keyboards

Chris Caffery: Guitars

Roddy Chong: Violin

Angus Clark: Guitars

Joel Hoekstra: Guitars

Mee Eun Kim: Keyboards

Vitalij Kuprij: Keyboards

Jane Mangini: Keyboards

Asha Mevlana: Violin

Johnny Lee Middleton: Bass

John O. Reilly: Drums

Jeff Plate: Drums

Derek Wieland: Keyboards

David Zablidowsky: Bass

Dave Wittman: Drum, Guitar
And Bass Inserts For Those Little
Things The Rest Of Us Forgot

LEAD VOCALS:

The Night Conceives: Kayla
Reeves

Not The Same: Kayla Reeves

Forget About The Blame:

Robin Borneman, Lzzy Hale

Prometheus: Jeff Scott Soto

Not Dead Yet: Russell Allen

Stay: Adrienne Warren

Past Tomorrow: Jennifer Cella

BACKGROUND VOCALS:

Forget About The Blame: Lucille
Jacobs, Minnie W. Leonard, Keith
Jacobs

Who I Am: Danielle Sample, Erika
Jerry, Chloe Lowery, Dari Mahnic,
Bart Shatto, Andrew Ross, John
Brink, Natalya Piette, Jodi Katz,
James Lewis, Georgia Napolitano,
Tim Hockenberry

**Time And Distance (The
Dash):** Danielle Sample, Chloe
Lowery, Ava Davis, Kayla Reeves,
Adrienne Warren, Andrew Ross,
Chris Pinnella, Rob Evan, Parker
Sipes, Phillip Brandon, Dustin
Brayley, April Berry, Autumn
Guzzardi

STRINGS:

Roddy Chong
Asha Mevlana
Lowell Adams
Nancy Chang
Lei Liu

HORNS:

Jon Tucker (Leader)

Kenneth Brantley

Jay Coble

Ashby Wilkins

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Time And Distance
(The Dash) (O'Neill, Oliva)
Madness Of Men
(Beethoven/O'Neill/Oliva)
Prometheus (Beethoven/O'Neill/
Oliva)
Mountain Labyrinth
(Borodin/Mussorgsky/O'Neill)
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Borodin/Glazunov/O'Neill/Oliva)
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Oliva)
Forget About The Blame (J Green)
Not Dead Yet (O'Neill/Oliva)

Past Tomorrow (O'Neill/Oliva)
Stay (O'Neill)
Not The Same (O'Neill/O'Neill)
Who I Am (O'Neill)
Lullaby Night (Bach, O'Neill)

Arrangements: Paul O'Neill / Al
Pitrelli / Derek Wieland

We Try To Answer As Many
Letters As Possible

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**WRITTEN FOR
DEIREE AND
IRELAND WILDE**



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