



CRITICAL THOUGHTS: FROM A LIFE EXAMINED

Liner Notes

N A R R O W L I G H T P R E S S

These songs did not begin as an album.
They accumulated.

Some began with an observation that would not leave. Some with affection, irritation, memory, attraction, absurdity, or an object whose significance seemed disproportionate to its size. Some arrived through the constructed worlds of Narrowlight; others came directly from an ordinary life examined perhaps a little more closely than is strictly comfortable.

Eventually they began speaking to one another.

The Inspector opens with the act that underlies much of what follows: looking. Not merely seeing, but examining—the uncomfortable habit of asking what remains when assumption, explanation and convenient narrative are stripped away.

From there the record wanders deliberately.

Glitter Goes permits itself irreverence. *A Ghost of You* turns toward absence. *If He Walked Among Them* asks what happens when professed values encounter the inconvenient reality of the person they supposedly honor. *If It Holds* considers structures by the oldest meaningful test: whether they continue to bear weight.

Out of Time With You is lighter because a life examined is not necessarily a life conducted entirely under storm clouds. Sometimes the problem is simply timing. Sometimes the right music arrives at the wrong moment.

Mark The Weight From Kharkiv begins with an object: a plumb bob shipped from a place whose name now carries considerably more weight than its mass could explain. Objects acquire histories without asking for them. We do too.

Then the scale begins to change.

The Constants asks what remains when circumstances do not. Relation looks outward across generations of ordinary labor—the mason, the glazier, the printer, the teacher, the baker, the bell maker—and toward the innumerable people who live within the consequences of work performed by hands they will never know.

The mason and the glazier never know the names of those who will someday watch the rain from the shelter their hands helped make.

No hand has ever labored for itself alone.

From there, *Come Eat* offers perhaps the oldest answer available. Sit down. There is food. There is room. Whatever abstractions we have constructed about civilization eventually have to survive contact with a table and the people gathered around it.

And then the record goes somewhere smaller.

In the Lower Chamber ends with two men in a hot service corridor and almost nothing happening.

That almost is the point.

There is attraction, recognition, heat and the possibility of contact. Neither man crosses the remaining distance. Nothing is confessed. Nothing is resolved. The machinery continues beneath them.

The album ends there because an examined life does not end in a conclusion.

It ends, temporarily, in a condition.

The visual language surrounding these songs developed much the same way.

Dark fields, worn surfaces, rain, metal, paper, warm windows and aged gold gradually became recognizably Narrowlight.

The images were never intended to make eleven different works look identical. Coherence is not uniformity. A song about mistimed attraction should not be darkened simply because another song requires darkness.

The album image eventually became a meadow.

At first there was only landscape and light. Then, during the process of revision, something unexpected appeared: a doorway. It was an artifact of the edit.

We kept it.

A figure stands before it. Another seems to exist beyond it. The doorway itself is just sufficiently impossible to disturb an otherwise ordinary landscape. Above it hangs the plumb.

The alignment was another accident worth preserving. The instrument associated with measure and ground truth came to rest over the principal source of illumination, with the threshold beneath it.

Light. Measure. Threshold. Record.

None of that was designed first and justified afterward. It emerged from the making.

That distinction matters.

There is another record behind this one.

Working versions have numbers. Images have predecessors. Lyrics have discarded lines. A furnace once inexplicably operated beneath two sweating men on a sultry southern night until someone finally noticed that this was an excellent way to kill the protagonists.

Those things belong to provenance.

They do not belong in the titles.

The public works therefore carry their names without production suffixes. The underlying revision history remains preserved separately because the finished artifact and the evidence of its making serve different purposes.

That principle extends to the use of generative tools in the production of this record. Human authorship, machine assistance, iteration, rejection, accident and selection are part of the history of the work. They need neither theatrical concealment nor constant interruption of the work itself. The record should be allowed to be heard.

The provenance should remain available.

Critical Thoughts: From A Life Examined is not offered as a thesis.

There are love songs here, political irritation, private longing, social observation, constructed history, humor, memory and the occasional piece of evidence that became troublesome simply because somebody bothered to look at it.

Perhaps that is the relation among them.

A life examined closely enough does not become simpler. It becomes more densely connected.

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The mason and the glazier never know
the names of those who will someday
watch the rain from the shelter their
hands helped make. An object crosses
an ocean. A meal gathers people
around a table. Two men nearly touch.
Someone looks through a window
and notices that the reflection contains
something the view does not.

The work goes ever on
though every hand is gone.

And somewhere beyond the meadow,
there is a door.

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