

LOVE AT NIGHT

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It started with what I thought was just another innocuous Instagram post. But it finished with a song. Albeit, a lyrically different type of song than I normally write.

I say it started there. Sitting here now, bourbon in hand as another lockdown day ends, upon reflection I realise it's not entirely accurate to say that's how it began.

Though I didn't know it at the time, I suppose it really started long before I even put pen to paper, clamped a capo on my guitar and searched my way through some suspended 4th and minor 7th chords.

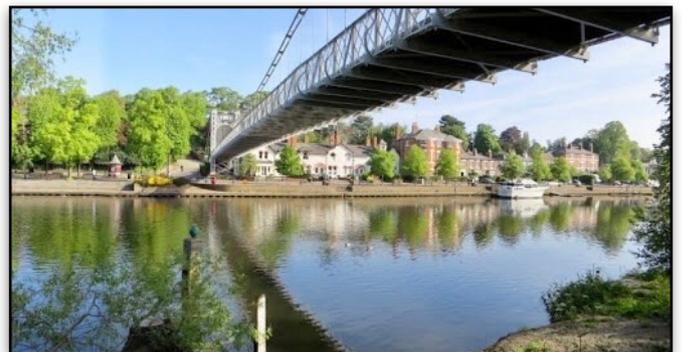
I now realise there was a journey to writing 'Love at Night' that began a few years before when idly walking Chester pavements with the person that would later become my wife.

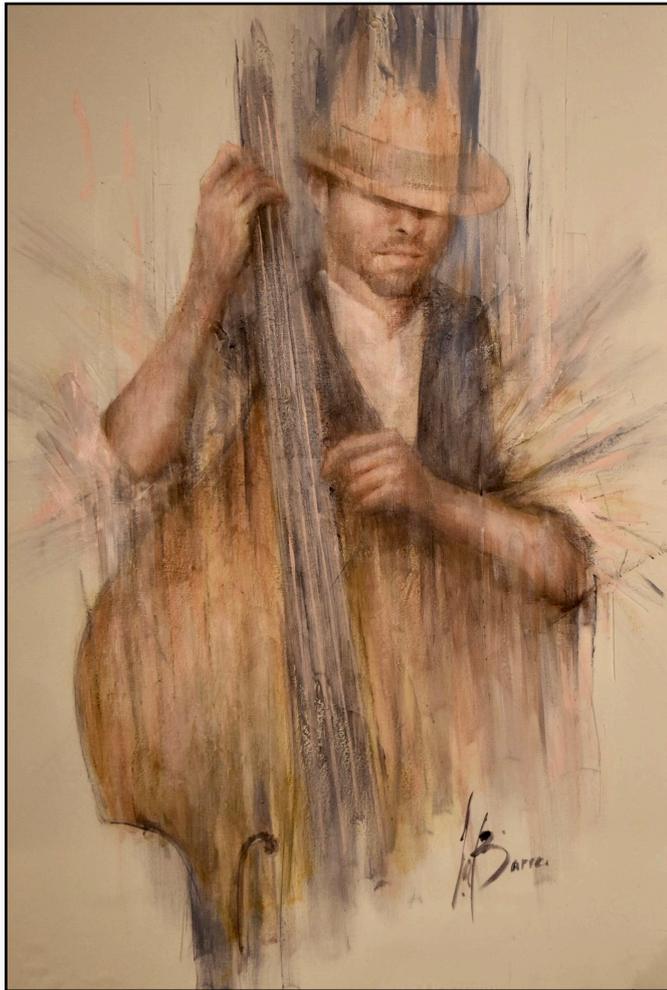
That day, I talked mainly about music. She talked enthusiastically about art. We agreed they overlap.

Without having to tell each other, we knew we overlapped too.

Resting beneath the shade of a tree by the river, we talked about music and art and books and films and life and love. We had much in common. There was much we had to discover too.

We sometimes talked. We sometimes sat in comfortable silence. We were in no rush.





I watched the river glide past and didn't want any more of my life to pass without her.

The warm afternoon flowed past like the logs in front of us on the river. Anything we didn't know about each other was a fascination.

This was our first summer together. It was the first summer I allowed detritus from my previous life to wash past me, flow downstream and away forever. I had been waiting for the light. A new canvas could be started.

Our future began when my newly found soul mate introduced me to the works of the painter Remi LaBarre.

Remi LaBarre is a self-taught artist from a small Canadian town called Thetford Mines that became a hub for one of the world's largest asbestos producing regions. Asbestos mining is a problematic past it too has left behind.

After the river, we wandered in and out of shadows to an art gallery on St Michael's Row that coincidentally had a LaBarre canvas on display. To be honest, my wife saw something in that painting that I had not seen until that moment. But now my eyes were open. My life didn't have to be closed. I could

see our future together. Life didn't have to be at a standstill again.

My wife was entranced by the LaBarre canvas in front of her. So, without hesitation, I spent just about all my savings on buying it for her.

That walk in and out of shadows on warm Chester pavements on a lazy summer's day is how 'Love at Night' was created within me before I even knew it. It was part of me long before I'd put pen to paper lyrically drawing the life of asbestos mining community musicians across the Atlantic in Canada.

Now, two years later, life was at a standstill again. But this time for deadly reasons. Virus. Lockdown.

None of us knew what was going to happen. I only knew I didn't want to stand still again. I didn't want to be musically inactive. So, whilst trying to work out what to do, I realised I had to continue writing and recording.

The living room in our home, which we moved in to two years earlier, needed decorating. It was the only room that had yet to be done. We'd put it off. So many wires to mess with. My recording corner needed stripping down and guitars needed hanging on the wall for convenience.

And so, after a couple of days of hard work, I finally got to hang my six string 'paintbrushes' on the wall next to the Remi LaBarre canvas I'd bought in Chester two years before on a summer's afternoon that changed my life. I stood back and looked at it.

My mind was drawn into the paint for the hundredth time, cradled on each side by my guitars. In my silence, I heard the music painted in it by a thousand brushstrokes. I stared deep into the musical soul of a Thetwood Mines musician I would never know playing jazz in a smokey bar three thousand miles away across the sea.

After his song was over, I returned to the silence of my home and photographed the wall. I uploaded the photograph to Instagram, with Remi LaBarre tagged in for good measure. It was as unassumingly simple as that. I never thought what happened next would occur.

Not long afterwards, my phone told me Remi had 'liked' my post. That 'like' was praise in itself. But I also received a message from Remi telling me he listened to my music and liked it.

We chatted for a while. He asked if I would consider 'painting' a song about his art and what I see. I was more than honoured.

But as we sent messages back and forth, I realised I couldn't simply write a song about just the art, as the artist was as much a part of his paintings as I am a part of my songs. I not only wanted to capture what I saw in his paintings, I needed to tell his story too.

Before moving to Montreal, Remi was born in a small town in Quebec. He found art. He wasn't formally trained. As a child he would spend hours practicing, first with crayons and pencils, and then paints.

Conversation with Remi turned to how he felt like an imposter because of his lack of formal training, and to his love of food, music, travels and wine.

I pictured him working.

There is music playing in the background and brush strokes move to the rhythm in the air.

You're in love with all the places

Where the music always plays

Inspired by the heart beats

When beauty held your gaze

The idea for the song was there. But there would be one more brush stroke. Remi told me about a film he loved called 'A Love Song for Bobby Long'. I hadn't seen it but said I would look it up.

The film inspired the opening lines of my song. In the film, Remi mentioned is a book called 'The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter'. I thought that title was a perfect opening for my song.



A main character in the film is called Pursy Will. As the plot progresses, Pursy Will said she wanted to work in a hospital taking x-rays to see the pictures inside. She wanted to get past the surface of people and how they often present versions of themselves for the public to see. She wanted to see into their soul. I now had the opening lines.

The Heart is a lonely hunter / See portraits inside

I knew that next I wanted to begin to blur the lines between song writing and painting.

Each canvas is a new song just waiting for the light.

The first verse was complete. Next, I wanted to reference where Remi came from and how he had wanted to break free from the need to prove himself. I decided to give this part a somber tone.

Does that shy boy live within you?

Does he still have the world to prove?

From swimming in the black lakes

To painting in your childhood room.

For the next verse, I wanted to bring out my feelings about Remi's art.

A large portion of his work makes me think about a late night after the music has slowed down or even stopped. There are less people around. It can be a lonely time. Hopefully, you're lucky enough to be with the right someone. There is also a longing for this love in his work.

To give your love at night, a moment so revered

Are you longing for the feelings you thought had disappeared?

I wanted to merge the lines between song writing and painting. I wanted to show the way art (be it paint, music, sculpture or any other medium) can bring back moments from when you first experienced them.



A band of brushes play your songs, paint dancing in every stroke.

Can you recall the perfume and the feelings she evoked?

Remi's art makes me think of music. I don't know if that's because I'm inspired to write music by what I see or because Remi is so inspired by it.

Remi fairly recently moved to Montreal. Even though he doesn't play any instruments himself, music is a big part of his life there.

You're in love with all the places

Where the music always plays

Inspired by the heart beats

When beauty held you gaze

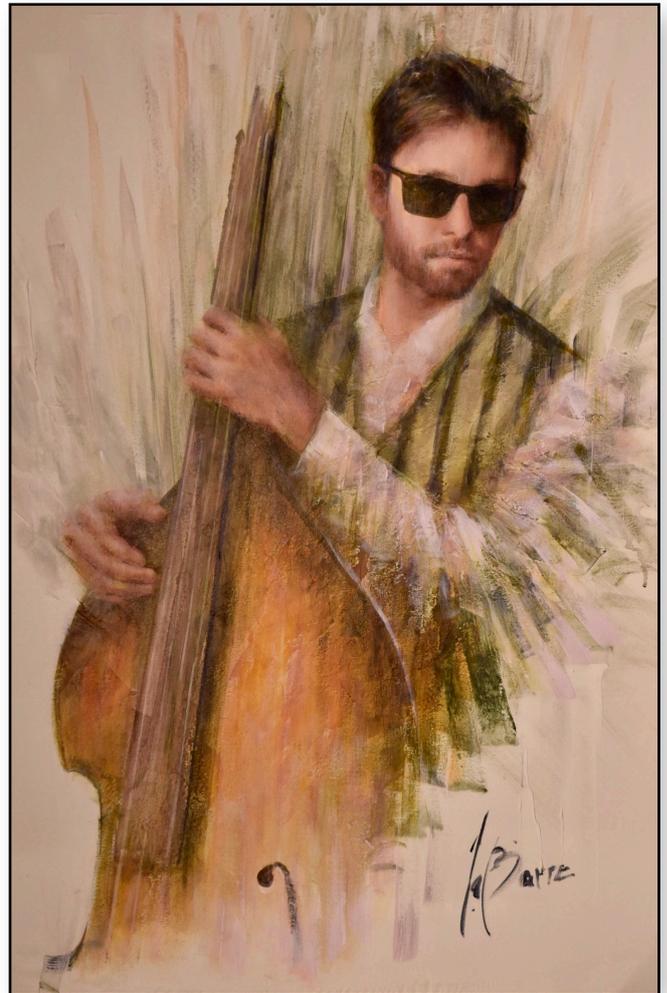
For the ending of the song, I wanted to again blur the lines and show how music and paint can set the mood, atmosphere and feelings in a room.

When you open up your soul

Let the music paint the room

When the red wine's overflowing

Your paint brush sings the mood



Remi LaBarre - <https://remilabarre.com/>

'Love at Night' is available from September 2020.

<https://garethheesom.com/>