

The Boat That Carries Us, Peter Himmelman

reviewed by [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [November 26, 2014](#) issue

In Review



The Boat That Carries Us

Peter Himmelman
Himmasongs

Peter Himmelman is a rock 'n' roll anomaly: an observant Jew who has long declined to play any shows on the sabbath. But this serious commitment to his faith gives his songs heft. He's addressed brokenness, healing, and humility in songs such as "Impermanent Things"

and “Mission of My Soul.” And Himmelman has a knack for melding lyrical complexity with catchy melody.

On *The Boat That Carries Us*, he demonstrates that he still has the touch. He’s got a stellar crew backing him, including drummer Jim Keltner (who played on solo albums for three of the four Beatles) and bassist Lee Sklar (James Taylor, Michael Jackson). They pound out jungle rhythm on “Angels Die” and chug with rockabilly delight on “In the Hour of Ebbing Light,” where Himmelman juxtaposes images of cities about to burn against a last-chance journey back to Eden. It’s a song in which light and shadow wrestle, and any chance of escape comes only in the twilight time.

“On 33K Feet,” Himmelman again conjures extremes—the soaring speed of air flight with the exhaustion of travel, all giving way to the mysterious feeling of being “somehow complete.” The song is anchored by a plaintive electric guitar riff built around two screaming notes, giving the effect of staring down on dark, swift cumulus clouds from an airplane window.

On minor-key tone poem “Green Mexican Dreams,” Himmelman’s protagonist drives a black El Camino into a whirlwind, reciting psalms and beholding visions of St. John Bosco, who tells him: “The road to hell is impossible to drive.” The predawn darkness eventually yields the promise of “coming home” and rising “far above the ashes of this solitary day.”

The title cut documents an altogether different travel vision in a sparse musical milieu. Here it’s just Himmelman and his acoustic guitar, delivering a modern-day psalm of encouragement: “An unseen hand moves us all / The darkest sky gives way to dawn / The boat that carries us needs no sail.”

Anchored from start to finish by Himmelman’s robust singing—the voice of a confident rocker who eschews melodrama for mellow soulfulness—*The Boat That Carries Us* crackles with special songs. They transport us, one way or another, toward wholeness, surrender, and striving for something deeper.