

Father John Misty – “*God’s Favorite Customer*”



The artist behind the ego:

Josh Tillman, mostly known by his performance nom de guerre Father John Misty, is a Maryland born indie folk/rock singer; although he began his musical career as a drummer playing for minor indie bands like Saxon Shore while working in a bakery for a day job. He was born in an evangelical household and was very religious during his youth, something he resented his parents for when he grew up. While working as a drummer, he wrote music for himself in his free time. He attended a private Christian college but dropped out as he felt more comfortable in his music career.

Through touring, he made connections with other artists and his demos made their way to Damien Jurado, a fellow Sub Pop artist. He would then go on to open for Jurado. In 2006, he had his first studio album released under



the moniker J. Tillman. He then went on to produce four more albums (eight in total), with the last one being released in 2010. During his J. Tillman years, a lot of the music he made was very folk and has joked about the music he made being “sad bastard music.” He found very little success doing folk albums.

During this time as J. Tillman, he joined the indie band Fleet Foxes as the drummer. In an interview with Rolling Stone, he stated that, “With Fleet Foxes I had to confront a certain sacred cow in my life, which was the idea that if I was in a popular band, if I just get to be a working musician, then that’s going to be the antidote for all the boredom and pain in my life. But it’s so much easier to be successful than it is to be happy.” He left the band in 2012 with no regrets, and after that he chose to pursue a solo career under the name Father John Misty.

The album:

God’s Favorite Customer is Father John Misty’s fourth studio album. This album was written in a period of six weeks where he was living “on the straits.” For two months, he was living in a hotel room and was perpetually drunk. In an interview with Uncut, he revealed that this was a heartbreak album, and while it didn’t follow one concept, much of it was inspired by an event that caused his life to blow up. He hasn’t been specific, and said that he wouldn’t be comfortable in saying what exactly caused his life to blow up for another thirty years or so. Many speculate that the event might have something to do with his wife Emma, and in the song *The Songwriter*, he expresses a lot of regret over exposing their relationship in past albums.



God's Favorite Customer, album cover

Compared to his previous efforts, this album was much more sincere. *Fear Fun* was a journey of drunken self-loathing, *I Love You, Honeybear* was both passionate and satirical, and *Pure Comedy* was an airing of grievances. On *God’s Favorite Customer*, Josh Tillman’s satirical lyrics built upon layers of irony and self-loathing were traded in

for sincerity and self-reflection, but not without details of his drunken stupors. *God's Favorite Customer* is a self-produced album, but most of this album was recorded with Jonathan Rado of Foxygen as he has production credits on every song but two. While *Pure Comedy* critiques American politics, religion, and capitalism, on this new record Father John Misty strays away from that and instead his lyrics are very honest.

Individual track reviews:



Hangout at the Gallows: 9/10

Hangout at the Gallows is the opening track on the album. Out of all of the songs on the album, this song sounds most like a traditional Father John Misty song. It could have very well fit in with the more political songs at the end of *I Love You Honeybear* like Bored in the USA. While this album for the most part strays away from any explicit political talk, he asks the audience, "What's your politics? What's your religion?" As mentioned before, most of this album was written during a period of time where he was locked in a hotel room and drunk and you get your first mention of that with the line "Psychic terrorists in the upper room." While this ties in the hotel theme literally, it also clues you into his psyche. His mind is tormenting him and he's far away from his wife. Out of all of the tracks on this album, this one is the most indie-rock. The chorus and percussion are feels incredibly grand.

Mr. Tillman: 10/10

Mr. Tillman was the promotional single from the album and there's good reason for it, as it represents the album the best. His trademark irony is front and center. This song is sung from the perspective of a hotel employee who is trying to deal with Mr. Tillman

whilst Tillman is going through a drunken mid-life crisis. In one line he sings, “Jason Isbell’s here as well and he seemed a little worried about you.” Jason Isbell (as in the singer-songwriter and guitarist for Green Hill) has acknowledged the song in an interview and stated that “If you had seen [Tillman] that day, you would have worried about him, too.” While the hotel employee is talking to Mr. Tillman, you hear of all of the unhealthy activities that Mr. Tillman has partaken in, namely leaving his passport in the fridge, sleeping on the balcony, and leaving his mattress out in the rain. Near the end



you hear the employee’s frustration with Mr. Tillman behavior in the lines, “Mr. Tillman, for the seventh time we have no knowledge of a film that is being shot outside; those aren’t extras in a movie; they’re our clientele; no, they aren’t running lines and they aren’t exactly thrilled.” Mr. Tillman is very clearly inebriated out of his mind and has a weak grasp on reality. In the music video, you see that the registry is filled with the name “Mr. Tillman,” the writing looks more and more distressed the further the list goes down and finally at the bottom the last name is just “Ill Man.”

The Palace: 7/10

While you get hints of it spread throughout the album, this song is explicitly about being in the hotel room and his mental health. Compared to the other tracks, this song sounds much more somber, using a piano as the main instrument. He sings, “last night I wrote poem, man I must have been in the poem zone.” While on its surface it sounds funny in that FJM is known for his lyricism and this line seems comically lazy, it also shows his mental exhaustion. Almost immediately in the next line he sings in an anxious and shaky voice, “I’m in over my head, I’m in over my head.” In a previous track about his failed romantic love life, he sang “And I’m insane enough to think I’m gonna get out with my skin and start my life again.” He initially believed that he could fix everything again but his ineptitude has led him to escape to a hotel room, and now he’s drunk and coming to the realization that he can’t fix this on his own without his wife.

The Songwriter: 10/10

The Songwriter is similar to the palace in that it’s somber, stripped back and prominently features a piano. It differs in theme and lyrics. Rather than it being about his declining mental state and a hotel room, it’s questioning the morality of being a songwriter. In the opening line, he asks, “What would it sound like if you were the songwriter and you made your living off of me?” In this song, he showcases a lot of guilt over writing songs

about his wife, Emma, as his most listened to songs are about love (True Love Baby, Chateau Lobby No.4, I Love You, Honeybear.) This song is easily the most profound on the album. He asks that if the roles were switched and he was her muse, would she write songs about her “constant-consternation.” He asks, “would you undress me repeatedly in public to show how noble and naked you can be?” Here, he feels a lot of guilt over revealing details about their relationship in his music for fame. He feels like she’s annoyed with constantly being exposed in his music, while he’s afraid to be vulnerable and yet he gets all the praise. In the final line, he asks “what would it sound like if you were the songwriter and loving me was your unsung masterpiece?”