



Stone Broke:

5 New Sessions for Robert Johnson

Project By: O.S.L.U.

When Robert Johnson was my age he was dead.

The inspiration for this project came from a road trip I took in the late summer of 2015. As someone always fascinated by the traditions of Blues and Rock and Roll, I decided to journey through Tennessee and Mississippi. The life and legend of Robert Johnson runs deep through the state of Mississippi; from the famed Crossroads where he allegedly sold his soul, to his three disputed burial sites. 'Stone Broke' is a project made in tribute to both Robert Johnson, and Eric Clapton – two of the most important figures in classic and contemporary blues music.

Fellow musicians will agree that the search for Robert Johnson is as much about the music as it is about the man. Working on this project has taught me what others have often spoken about; namely Johnson's innate affinity to music – sounding like two guitarists, and singing at the same time. Reaching notes and nuances that I, for one, was not able to get anywhere near. Although listening to his music has given me much enjoyment, trying to recreate it has been a benign frustration. I have gained a deeper appreciation of his music, and a realisation of how distinct Johnson's songs are, with the added consideration of the time they were recorded.

Interpreting Johnson's music is a difficult task and there are limitations in attempting it as a white twenty-something in 2018 – something which I am abundantly self-aware of. This is, however, a labour of love; something I've tried to approach with good faith, and sincere feeling.



Making The Trip:

In September 2015, I travelled by car through some of the southern states of America. Along the way, I stopped at Greenwood Mississippi, the town where Robert Johnson is supposed to have died.

I was intrigued by John Hammond's 1992 video, 'The Search for Robert Johnson'. In the final ten minutes, he discusses some of the myths surrounding Johnson's death... One of the better-known stories is that Robert was poisoned by the jealous husband of a lover. This is one of the rumours, and the question of his burial is just as ambiguous.

There are now three observed resting places for Robert Johnson, each of which I took time to find when visiting the town:



greenwoodms.com

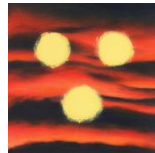




Myths, Legends and OSLU.

Many of Johnson's songs have been covered over the years, some of which – Cross Road Blues and Sweet Home Chicago, for example – have now entered the realm of the blues standard.

For this project I deliberately chose to record the songs that have not been as heavily represented in the repertoires of other blues musicians. We have covered five Robert Johnson songs, and tried to craft each one with a slightly different flavour.



The album artwork is a representation of being 'Stone Broke' in modern day life, and combining that with a hint of mystique; the likes of which Robert Johnson is renowned for. The three golden balls do not form a pagan symbol, but a pawnbroker's logo, which ruins an alluring background of fiery red and black clouds.

O.S.L.U. is Our Secret Little Underground.

I hope this little project succeeds in evoking more questions than it attempts to answer.

Andy Lewis
January 2018

Bibliography:

Robert Johnson Complete Recordings (Sony)

Me & Mr. Johnson – Eric Clapton

Sessions For Robert J – Eric Clapton

The Search For Robert Johnson – John Hammond

Escaping The Delta – Elijah Wald

Robert Johnson: The New Transcriptions. Pete Billmann/Dave Rubin

Acknowledgements:

In no order, I'd like to thank Ian Forsyth for being a good friend and always showing support and encouragement towards this project. Su Kirby-Clarke for helping me have more confidence in my voice, Anna Wharmby for proofreading these notes, Robert Cheshire for his knowledge and constructive comments, and to Peter Estlin for showing me how it's done.

*All photos are from the authors own personal collection, unless stated otherwise.
Image of ARL playing acoustic guitar copyright Clive Dyke, 2017.*

*Every effort has been made to obtain permissions for all photographic reproductions.
Any errors will be corrected in later editions of these notes.*