

Way off in the distance, across endless desert sands and beneath an infinite starry sky, you can hear the faint cry of the mystic, weeping in love and longing, and singing a melody so profound that it can only be discerned by beings of the most incandescent light. Yet his voice is strangely human and raw, and, like a raging river descending from the Himalayas, his song rolls and churns with all the passionate emotions of a human being yearning for God.

Men and women like this, cosmic songwriters with the ability to translate the deepest unexpressed feelings of the heart into melodies and rhythms, have lived and breathed before the advent of our modern concept of time. They sang in every language, in every land. They sang what we couldn't speak; they interceded to uplift our souls to spirit consciousness; they gave us songs to sing so we too could reach the very heights of divine love.

ABOUT THE ALBUM

The nine compositions on this album continue this ancient stream of devotion. These mystical songs, though veined with heart-wrenching sorrow, express the deepest spiritual longings of the human psyche. Yet, when sung with beauty, heartfelt intensity, and vulnerability, these primordial emotions give birth to an unspoken well of sublime joy. The lyrics, composed by Nubia and I, rest on the very breath of our mystical ancestors. The inspiration is from their passionate hearts and ardent poetry. These songwriters of Bhakti were untamed revolutionaries, proclaiming the triumph of love over hate. May we, in our small way, sing like they sang, fearlessly and with abandon, longing for darshan, praying for all beings to be free.

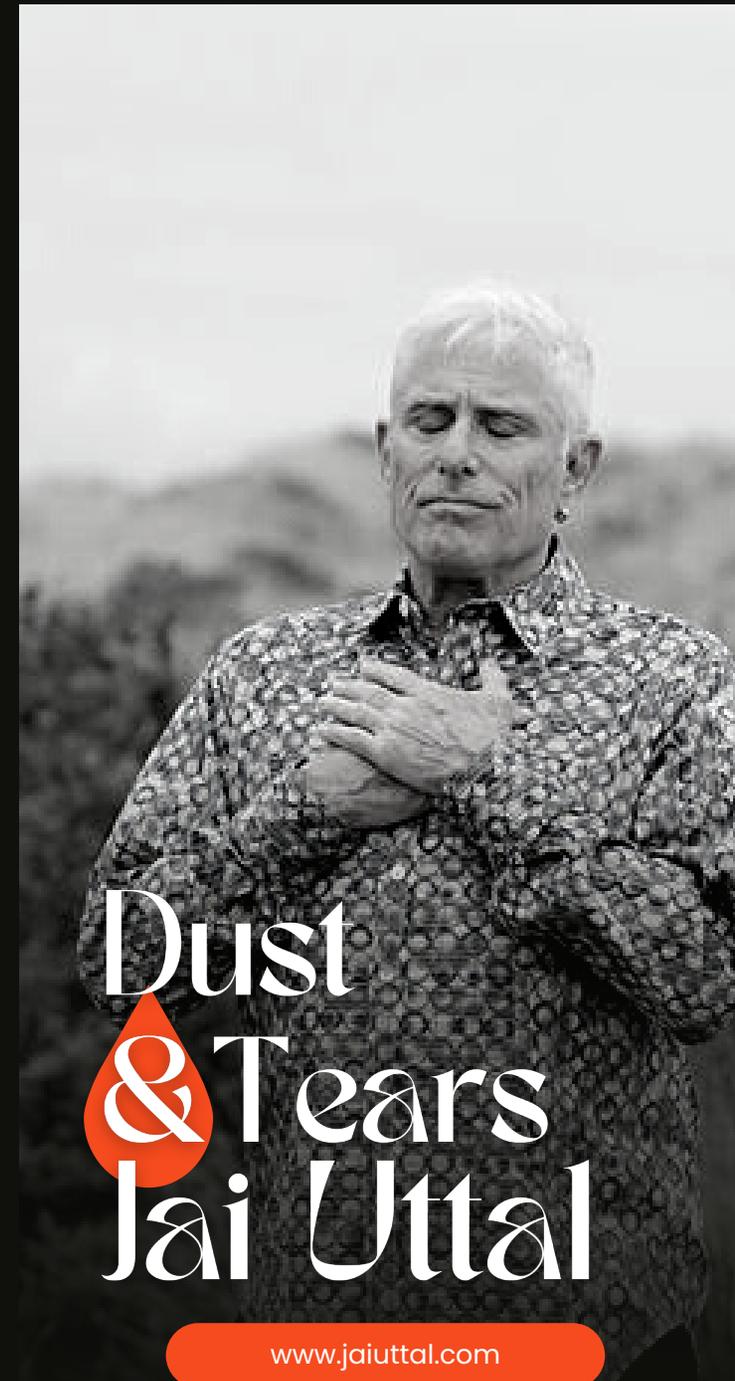
Each of these songs grew from a seed found in an ancient text – sometimes it was a line, sometimes just a word, and sometimes simply the sentiment – which was planted in the soil of our souls to sprout into the music you hear today.

‘Jai Uttal’s new album, “Dust & Tears,” is a gem. It is essential Jai but in a new dimension, as beautiful as his many other works, but more available to the (my) western ear.

On “Dust & Tears” prayers are veiled, but ever present. “Psalm” is a spiritual and musical blockbuster of melody, arrangements, vocal, and chorus.

I’m happy putting the entire album on repeat, which is exactly where it is while I write this.

— Joan Baez



Dust & Tears Jai Uttal

www.jaiuttal.com

1) Senseless Heart

Inspired by the Bauls of Bengal.

The word 'Baul' has many meanings, but the simplest one is 'God Intoxicated'. These 'mad' mystic singers and songwriters have traveled across the landscapes of West Bengal for centuries performing their ecstatic music for all who would listen. Anyone who knows me knows of my connection to these wondrous men and women with whom I lived and studied in the winter of 1973. The Bauls have their own unique musical instruments as well as their own way of singing and playing. If I could sum it up in one sentence I'd say: 'they attempt to break through the mantle of the sky and reach the highest heavens through their singing and playing!'

The chorus to this song expresses the core spiritual and existential fear that flows through so many of us. And, like all Bengali poems and songs, the verses express our primal longings through pictures and images of the many sides of the natural world. Oh!!!! My senseless heart!! Have I wasted all my life????

Oh my senseless heart
Have I wasted all my life
Looking for the sight of you
Longing for the scent of you

Crawling in the darkness of the earth
As low as water flows
How many ways are in your love
Just a single drop I've known

Oh my senseless heart....

As I cry the lightning breaks the sky
The burning winds they blow
How many flavors are in your love
Just a single taste I've known

Oh my senseless heart....

Poisoned by the flowers of my tears
Where has your shelter gone
How many thorns are in your love
Just a single pain I've known

Bengali verse:

Jamon beni temani robey chul vijabona
Chul vijabona nagori beni vijabona
Edharo odharo shataro pataro
Kori a na gona

These words are from a song I learned while living among the Bauls of Bengal in 1973. My friends and I rented a small house on the outskirts of the village of Shantiniketan in West Bengal. Very quickly our home became a nightly gathering spot for different groups of itinerant Baul singers. Sometimes we made sure to lock up our valuables and at other times we were transported to the highest realms of devotion.

Our music teacher was a young man named Vaidyanath Das Baul. He would teach us through singing and playing and our neighbor, a great Bengali artist named Kiran Sinha, would do his best to translate the songs into English. It was a truly wonderful time.

VERY roughly translated, these words mean: 'I will jump into the water but my long plaited hair won't get wet! This, of course, is a metaphor for being in the world but not 'of' the world, like the lotus that floats on the lake of muddy water but remains clean and pure.



2) Cover Me With Your Feathers

Inspired by Psalm 91, attributed to Moses.

Approximately 3,500 years ago, a humble shepherd named Moses was tending his father-in-law's flock on Mount Horeb, when he heard the voice of an angel directing him to take off his sandals and put his head to the ground. Upon looking up, he saw that a small desert bush in front of him had been enveloped by a raging fire which neither consumed the plant nor diminished in intensity. Echoing from the center of the bush came a thunderous, yet gentle, voice commanding Moses to lead his people out of oppression and take them to the promised land, the land of milk and honey.

Trembling, Moses asked the voice to identify itself. In a ringing tone, flowing with compassion, the voice answered that he was the Lord of the Ancestors, that he was Yahweh, which translates as "I am that I am!", or "I am the soul of creation, the indwelling spirit within all beings."

Contrary to the Hollywood image of Moses, the shepherd was actually very shy and had difficulty speaking clearly. He was reluctant to take the job of confronting the Egyptians and freeing the slaves because of his stuttering and insecurity. Yahweh reacted by angrily rebuking Moses for presuming to lecture the 'One who made the mouth' on who was qualified to speak and not to speak. But the Lord relented and allowed Moses' erudite brother, Aaron, to accompany him to the promised land.

After many years of intense hardship and wandering, the weary tribe began to lose heart and doubt Moses and doubt the Lord to whom the prophet spoke. Moses heard, within the depths of his heart, the voice of Yahweh instructing him to climb to the top of Mount Sinai. With much trepidation, Moses climbed the mountain upon which he saw, floating above the peak, a vast 'Divine Cloud' with many angels flying in and out and up and around it. Some of the angels were beatific and benevolent; the angels of peace, of love, of healing. Others, however, were terrifying; the angels of death, disease, destruction. As he ascended into the cloud, Moses was frozen in fear and spontaneously sang to his Lord a song begging for protection and mercy. This song became known as the 91st Psalm, in King David's immortal Book of Psalms. As a prayer of protection, it is most often invoked in times of hardship and suffering.

Cover me with your feathers
Raise me up in your wings
You who've set your love upon me
You to whom I sing

Protect me from the terrors of night
The arrows that fly by day
The wave of fear that captures me
And carries me away

I heard you call my name
I heard the angels fly
I saw the dragon 'neath my feet
I saw my body die

Come to me in my sorrow
Be my refuge and my will
I've come to you upon the mountain
I feel my heart grow still

Hebrew Verses from the original psalm, sung by
Amir Paiss:

יֵשֶׁב בְּסִתְרֵי עֲלִיּוֹן בְּצֵל שְׁדָּי יִתְלוֹן:
לֹא־תִירָא מִפְּחַד לַיְלָה מִחֶץ יַעֲרֹף יוֹמָם:

כִּי בִי חֲשַׁק וְאֶפְלָטָהוּ אֲשַׁגְּבֵהוּ כִּי־יָדַע שְׁמִי:
קְרָאֵנִי | וְאֶעֱנֵהוּ וְאֶרְאֵהוּ בִּישׁוּעָתִי:

The One that dwells in the cover of the Most
High, abides in the shadow of the Almighty
You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow
that flies by day
Because he desired me I will deliver him, I will
raise him because he has known my name
He shall call upon me and I will answer and see
him in my salvation

3) Dust & Tears

Inspired by songs of the 14th century rebel-poet-
priest of Bengal, Chandidas.

Walking through the villages of West Bengal, along the dusty dirt paths and dried riverbeds, interspersed with brilliant 'jungly' flowers, we find Chandidas everywhere. His songs are sung on street corners, temples, family celebrations, and gatherings of sadhus, Bauls and mendicants around their sacred fires. It can be said that Chandidas represents the very heart of the Bengali people.

Born in the late 14th century, Chandidas was raised to be a Brahmin priest in a rustic temple to the divine mother. One day, upon hearing the sweet singing voice of the lower caste washerwoman, Rami, he fell immediately and deeply in love. Rami, for her part, also felt a love that she'd never dreamed possible and fell into ecstasy. As their affair blossomed, they began to write songs to each other, experiencing within themselves the divine presence of Radha and Krishna. Their love knew no bounds.

But, to the rigid societal laws of that time, any relationship between a washerwoman and a Brahmin was unthinkable, so the elders of the village did everything they could to force the lovers apart, finally burning down Rami's house and exiling her, and dismembering Chandidas on the back of an elephant. This is a very short version of an incredible and heartbreaking story.

Every moment of this dramatic romance was depicted in Chandidas's and Rami's songs, until the very end, whereupon legend took over. What we know without a doubt is that Chandidas gave his very life for love and is considered to be one of the great heroes of Bhakti. An inspiration to what has become known as the 'Sahaj Movement', Chandidas and Rami experienced and lived in the complete intermingling of divine AND human love. How could there ever be one without the other?

You brought the moon
Down to my hands
When you used to be
In love with me
Ohhh but the night ends
In dust and tears

Shame fills my world
As I'm leaving my home
Because you used to be
In love with me
Ohhh but the night ends
In dust and tears

I've hardened my mind
And put a lock on my heart
Because you used to be
In love with me
Ohhh but the night ends
In dust and tears

4) Love Is An Awkward Thing Inspired by a song of Surdas.

In the early 15th century a wave began to rise over the Indian subcontinent. This wave was called, among other things, the Bhakti Revolution. It was a movement of love that took spirituality out of the grasping hands of the Brahmins and put it back into the hands, hearts and languages of the common people (us!).

Born blind in approximately 1480, young Surdas was forced to leave his home at the very tender age of eight. In his wanderings he met the great saint Sri Vallabhacharya, who took the young boy under his wing. Surdas (literally 'servant of the divine sound') began singing and creating songs expressing his deep love and longing for Radha and Krishna, sometimes taking the voice of one and then the other, and at other times speaking as a loving observer. He became one of the foremost disciples of Sri Vallabhacharya, and his works were compiled in a book called 'Sur Sagara', the 'Ocean of Sur'.

What touches me so deeply in Surdas' songs is the way he sings of divine love in the most human terms. The observations he made in the 15th century are still potent and completely relevant today. Throughout India all blind singers are called Surdas in honor and remembrance of this great mystic songwriter.

Oh, when she sees him
She disbelieves him
Her eyes on his moonlike face
Her gaze is unmoving
But he's disapproving
Her heart runs an endless race

For love is an awkward thing
It ripples
Ripples the mind like waves
For love is an awkward thing
It's a river
That destroys before it saves

Oh, when he finds her
He tries to bind her
With charms and enchanting ways
He calls out to her with words that undo her
But no It's been ten long days

For love is an awkward thing
It ripples
Ripples the mind like waves
For love is an awkward thing
It's a river
That destroys before it saves

Radhe Govinda
Radhe Gopala
Radhe Govinda
Radhe Gopal

5) Such Is My Fate Inspired by a song of Vidyapati.

Vidyapati (approximately 1352-1460) had many roles in his long life, from playwright and Sanskrit grammarian, to political adviser, and royal priest. But for 26 years, starting in his late twenties, Vidyapati fell through the portal of ecstatic love and only wrote love songs to Radha and Krishna. Unlike his predecessor Jayadeva, the composer of the immortal Sanskrit song cycle 'Gita Govinda', Vidyapati wrote over 500 exquisite, individual, stand-alone songs, each one with its own raga and melody, written in the sweet local dialect of the villagers from his home in Madhuban, the 'forest of honey'.

Vidyapati primarily wrote from the female vantage point, as if he were inhabited by Sri Radha herself, experiencing the pangs of longing as well as the sublime bliss of lovemaking. At the end of these 26 years, this outpouring of love songs abruptly stopped and he went back to his other scholarly works. What happened?? Only the vast tunnels of time can answer that mystery. But these songs immortalized Vidyapati and are sung to this day at wedding celebrations and devotional festivals throughout the world.

The sea is all around but there's no water
No water to quench the fire that burns my soul
I gaze into your eyes though your thousands of
miles away
The arrows of your love pierce me night and day

Such is my fate
That the clouds give no rain
Such is my fate
That my love brings only pain only pain

I gave myself to you who holds the mountain
My heart is broken and nothing is left of me
My body aches with memories of our love out in
the rain
You claimed my heart and I don't wanna be free.

Such is my fate
That the clouds give no rain
Such is my fate
That my love brings only pain only pain

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna
Krishna Krishna
Hare Hare
Hare Rama Hare Rama
Rama Rama
Hare Hare

You left me in the night without a warning
My bed is empty and my mind in disarray
I remember the time I first heard you whispering
my name
I curse the sun for ever rising that day

Such is my fate
That the clouds give no rain
Such is my fate
That my love brings only pain, only pain

One thing that I fear
Is that my cries don't reach your ears
Am I calling out in vain
While my love brings only pain only pain

6) Psalm

Inspired by the 23rd Psalm.

The Book of Psalms is traditionally attributed to King David as its author and composer. David, who lived over 3,000 years ago, was born into a shepherd family, and spent his boyhood herding sheep in the hills and valleys of his homeland, far from the riches and responsibilities of a kingdom. Deeply connected to nature, David experienced, firsthand, the qualities of leading, guiding and protecting his herd. He often sang to his sheep as he directed their wanderings. Growing into adulthood, David became renowned as the greatest musician and singer in the land, and through the healing power of his songs, he gained favor with the king, who chose him as his successor, much to the chagrin of the king's sons and relatives.

Legend has it that the Book of Psalms was written by King David's hand as he was resting and listening to the wind caress the strings of gold, silver and copper that he had stretched above his bed. As the strings vibrated, notes began to fall, which transformed into letters, which transformed into words, into paragraphs and, ultimately, into psalms.

"Psalm 23 is a medicinal poetic capsule, describing the notion of unwavering trust in the source of all as the ultimate provider, guide and unconditional protector. It articulates poetically the essential truth, that there is no separation between one's soul and the Lord, creator and sustainer, regardless of circumstances. Trusting the Divine as guide and provider of every breath and each step in life, Psalm 23 sings of a deep acceptance and surrender to life's flow, and a sense of refuge, intimacy and safety."

- Amir Paiss, devotional singer, mystical Kabbalistic gypsy, and dear friend.

As I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

I have no fear
Cause I know you're with me
Yes I know you're with me

As I walk through the ruins and the wreckage of life

I have no fear
Cause I know you're with me
Yes I know you're with me

The lord is my shepherd
My sweet shepherd
He takes me by the still waters
He restores my soul

Goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life
Because I know I dwell in the house of the lord
Now and forever

The lord is my shepherd
My sweet shepherd
His rod and his staff they comfort me
As I cross the ocean of tears

7) Don't Fly Away

Several decades ago, one of my very closest friends was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's disease. He did everything he could, using both alternative as well as western medicine, to slow down or stop the degeneration of his cognitive functions, but, alas, nothing worked.

He was a great being - heroic, deeply spiritual, compassionate, wise and very funny. He saved my life by encouraging me to go to a treatment center and get sober. And he loved my songs and my singing.

When his final days arrived he was joyful, excited and a little scared to be going back to what he called 'Big Momma'. May he be blissfully and eternally dancing at Her feet.

Toward the end of his life, I sang this song into my iPhone voice memos and completely forgot about it until about two years later, when it just popped up on my phone. I miss my friend so much and decided to include this song on the album.

In the final refrain of the song, I sing the words 'Let Me Be Sky', which some of you may remember from my album 'Thunder Love'. This line is a quote from the great 16th century Bengali songwriter Govindadasa, whose songs were written in an ecstatic mood of longing for Krishna. Ecstasy and anguish, seemingly dichotomous emotions, are completely intertwined in songs of the Bhakti saints. Govindadasa's songs were compiled in a text called 'Gitamrta', or 'nectar songs'. He was fully immersed in the nectar of divine love.

Oh friend of mine
Don't fly away
The stories that brought us together
Are still real today

Don't fly away
Don't fly away
Time is just a sad sad song
With nothing to say
Don't fly away

Oh friend of mine
Hold your memories
You'll always find a refuge
In my melodies

Don't fly away
Don't fly away
Time is just a freight train
Rushing from yesterday
Don't fly away

Oh friend of mine
When you're all alone
Lost inside a mind
That can't find it's way back home

Don't fly away
Don't fly away
Time is just a wanderer
Longing for a place to stay
Don't fly away

Fly away fly away
Fly away fly away
Let me be sky
Let me be sky
I see the heavens
When I look in your eyes
Let me be sky
Let me be sky
Just take my hand
I know we can fly

8) Time And Again

Inspired by the songs of Mirabai.

Born in the last days of the 15th Century, Mirabai was very different from the children around her. As the princess of a wealthy Rajasthani kingdom she was surrounded by luxury. However, when she was quite young, a sadhu passed by and gave her a small statue of Krishna, which she cherished until the day she left this material world. With that simple gift, Mirabai's life was transformed, as was her heart - no more childish games and no more interest in the luxuries of the palace. She became completely enraptured and devoted to her beautiful Lord, Govinda.

The details of Mirabai's life are intertwined with legends, miracles and mystery, but some facts are verified. As she grew, so did her love for Krishna, a love as sensual as it was spiritual. She wrote hundreds of songs describing her stormy, but blissful, relationship with her Beloved. Reviled by her husband and her family, Mirabai finally left the palace and wandered through India as a yogini sadhu, singing her passionate songs of love wherever she went. Finally, as old age began to inhabit her body, she settled in Vrindavan, the holy village where Krishna lived as a youth. Mirabai is revered throughout India as a folk hero and a Bhakti saint. She gave up everything for her mystic lover. Her songs are sung at village gatherings and at the grandest concert halls. She is Bhakti incarnate.

Though scorned by the presiding culture of 16th century India, Mira's passionate devotion to her Lord, and her complete disregard for social mores, became a clarion call to the poor and marginalized masses, and to all women. She was, indeed, a mystic revolutionary, whose message and mood are timeless and resonate even today in the hearts of all.

The Hindi verse, 'Meera Kahe Prabhu Giridhara Nagara, Hey Govinda Hey Gopala', calls out: 'Oh Lord of Mira, Govinda, Gopala, lifter of the mountain'. One might paraphrase this as: 'Oh my Beloved, please lift this insurmountable mountain of suffering and separation, that I may be yours forever!'

Time and again you told me
That you would come with the rain
Time and again I'm lost in grief
My hopes have turned to pain

Singing to you is my consolation
Only in your name
Can I find peace
Time and again
Time and again

Counting the days since you've been gone
Footsteps cross this burning land
Come to me now
Before I cross to the other shore
This longing for your touch knows no end

Singing to you is my salvation
Only in your name
Can I find grace
Time and again
Time and again

Meera Kahe Prabhu
Giridhara Nagara
Hey Govinda
Hey Gopala

The whole night I pass counting the stars
Weaving a garland of tears
Day after day night after night
I'm weaving a blanket of years

Singing to you in my desolation
Only in your name can I find peace
Time and again
Time and again

Meera Kahe Prabhu
Giridhara Nagara
Hey Govinda
Hey Gopala

9) Ode To The Mystics

Inspired by all who went before...

A simple song of gratitude to those ancient mystic songwriters, our ancestors, who so generously gave us these beautiful keys to open the heart of devotion.

We've heard their words of longing
That yearn across the sea
We've felt their pain and suffering
As one humanity

In praise of life
In hope for love
These songs they came to be
From the cries of their tender hearts
These songs became the key

We're standing at the doorway
Of possibility
We look for a way to enter
This sweet eternity

In praise of life
In hope for love
These songs they came to be
From the cries of their tender hearts
These songs became the key

Dust & Tears Jai Uttal

Credits:

The Dust & Tears Mystic Orchestra:

Jai Uttal - vocals, guitar, banjo, dotar and

Couch Potato iPad Production

Ben Leinbach - drums, percussion and
bass

Ezra Uttal - keyboards

Sunniva Brynell - accordion

Visvambhar Sheth - mridanga

Vrinda Sheth - kartals

Jeff Cressman - trombone

The Pagan Love Choir - vocals

Sandy Cressman - choir director

Prajna Vieira

Natalie Cressman

Sandy Griffith

Lakshmi DeSanto

Lucía Lilikoi

With special guests:

Peter Apfelbaum - percussion, sax and
horn arrangements on 'Senseless Heart'
Jose Neto - guitar on 'Love is an Awkward
Thing' and 'Cover Me With Your Feathers'
Steve Postell - electric guitar on 'Don't Fly
Away'

Manose - bansuri on 'Don't Fly Away'

Amir Paiss - Hebrew vocal and Santur on
'Cover Me With Your Feathers'

Daniel Paul - harmonica on 'Psalm'

All songs by Jai Uttal and Nubia Teixeira
except 'Don't Fly Away', by Jai Uttal and
Ezra Uttal

Pavana Suta Music/BMI

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