

JIM KROFT

JOURNEYS #3



INFO TEXT

Jim Kroft is a musician and film maker from the UK, based in Berlin. In 2014 he started the “Journeys project” which has so far led him to China, East-Africa, Russia and most recently through Europe.

The Journeys project is a combination of music, documentary, and photography all made with the simple ethos - “one man, one guitar, one camera”. It is about breaking down barriers, encouraging cultural interaction and the belief that music remains the great connector.

During the winter of 2016 Jim lived in a van, learning about the realities, stories and challenges faced by refugees in Europe.

Inspired by his experiences he recently completed “Journeys #3” in a 48 h straight recording session. This album spearheaded a fundraising campaign which raised so far 17.000 euros to buy a boat for a rescue team on Lesbos called Proem Aid.



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WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE ARTS IN A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS ?

Returning from 30 shows across Russia in the winter of 2015, Jim wanted to bring his exploration of culture to his own continent. However, he felt that the only way he could legitimately look at Europe was to engage with its defining challenge - the refugee crisis.

However, this in turn brought up its own questions. In what ways can an artist legitimately explore the refugee phenomenon? What is the role of the arts in a humanitarian crisis? Unsure, Jim set out with the German photographer and film maker Bastian Fischer to explore what is really happening in Europe.

Through the journey he would explore, challenge and question what the role of the arts is, not just in relation to the refugee crisis, but more broadly, in modern society itself.



JOURNEY WITH REFUGEES IN EUROPE

On Lesbos, Jim spent time with rescue teams bringing in hypothermic people arriving on boats, saw children receiving CPR on beaches under the bitter cold of the European winter. Inspired by the bravery of those arriving, especially a little girl called Sara, Jim began tentatively penning songs in the back of his little yellow camper van.

Arriving in Idomeni the day the Macedonian border closed he witnessed the transit camp growing from 8,000 to 15,000 people. Shocked by the conditions in the camp, he spent the next 3 weeks reporting daily and raising awareness from the ground. His reportage videos were watched over 100.000 times leading to interviews on Sky News, German and Greenpeace Magazine.

On one of these days Jim covered the exodus of thousands of refugees from the camp. Along with reporters from ZDF and Time Magazine, he was arrested by armed Macedonian soldiers. Losing his Wellington Boots during the river crossing, Jim found himself in prison without shoes, money or a passport.

Expelled from Macedonia, Jim continued his journey through the Balkans where he met refugees living in squalid conditions in Bulgaria, saw young families sleeping rough in Serbia, and learnt about the challenges of making a life as a refugee in Croatia.



THE NEED FOR ART TO ENGAGE

At first unsure of the place of “culture” amongst a humanitarian crisis, Jim began to understand the ways that both music and video work could make a contribution.

He found himself re-animated by the power of culture amongst the refugees themselves - a beautiful Syrian woman who had defied Isis and their interpretation of Islam to smuggle out her paintings, wrapped in foil, as she crossed the Aegean. A Kurdish man who had brought over his Tambura guitar, and played it on the shore of Lesbos upon arrival.



Jim realised that true courage in relation to art necessitated engagement. Simply put, he reconnected with the visceral power of art to express something of the emotional resonance of a situation, which is not possible in reportage. It was from this basis that he started making his videos on the individual stories of refugees which captured the imagination of the internet. Moreover, one by one the songs were growing into an album worth of material.

“Under the Dome of Night” was written after wandering through the tents at night hearing the terrible sound of children shivering with flu. It reflects the understanding that beyond creed, class and culture, it is our human condition which we all share. On the other hand the lyrics to “Shadowlands” were began while in police custody in Macedonia - “we’ll cross that bridge together” - because we have to.

In Serbia Jim wrote “House of Many Colours” expressing his anger that the refugee crisis is being used to challenge fundamentally European ideas like the universality of a Human Right. Jim believes, that these ideas are as important for our own society, as for how we treat vulnerable people - whether the homeless, a refugee or the underprivileged.

The songs felt inextricably linked to the situation and as such he began his “Boat for Sara” campaign.



THE ALBUM: JOURNEYS #3

The album was recorded in 48 h straight in Berlin's Blackbird Studios. Both studio and musicians waived their fees so that the album could be recorded with a zero-budget philosophy - enabling all earnings to go towards the boat.

Simultaneous to the Berlin session, 3 songs, that Jim recorded in the Balkans, were sent to London's Urchin Studios. "Under the Dome of Night" is built up from the demo Jim recorded in a disused shepherds shack in Bulgaria, whereas "Borrow It" was born after being given shelter by a Serbian aid worker.

The recording session began on the day after Jim returned to Berlin. It turned into a marathon session during which all the musicians were pushed to the edge of their creativity.

Jim asked his band to imagine themselves to be on "hell's beach", to step into his emotional experience, but to evoke it instrumentally with great freedom. They played all the songs live in the studio. "That created imperfections, but it also created energy and magic and something captured. If you listen to one of those songs - that was the moment you are hearing".

Contributors for "Journeys #3" include Blackbird Music Studio (Berlin), Urchin Studios (London), Matt Ingram (Tom Odell drums), Dan Cox (Laura Marling producer), Matt Colton (James Blake / Muse mastering), Miles Showell (Nick Cave / Noel Gallagher mastering), George Moore (Kwabs keys), Jakob Nebel (Livingston guitars) and producer Gordon Raphael (The Strokes).



TRACKLIST:

1. Sara
2. God Knows Where
3. Shadowlands
4. House of Many Colours
5. Redemption
6. Like a Human Heart
7. Despite What Anyone Says
8. When I Meet My Maker
9. Under the Dome of Night
10. Borrow It
11. Try to Reach the Earth

JIM KROFT ON “SARA”

“I will never forget last night as long as I live. We arrived at 11pm last night and only finally left at 12 noon today simply because every human hand was needed. During the night, our beach alone handles around 10 boats with 60 people per boat. I’m talking mothers, children, screaming babies, teenagers, Dads, old men and woman. Freezing cold. Soaked in rain, waves, panic. Some in a 2 hour crossing. Some in 6. At night in the dark. One little girl, lost from her parents, faints in my arms and I don’t know if she’s going to die of cold right there, and I don’t know what to fucking do because I’m panicking and the medics are frantically resuscitating another child. Who does not make it. Who dies, right there on the beach next to me, while her parents scream and scream. And every clever opinion and narrative I’ve come across just noise and nonsense next to this. You’re talking kids dying on our shores next to their screaming parents. I take off the water sodden top of the girl, Sara and she wakes, freaking out because she does not know where she is or who I am. Her Mum finally finds us amongst the commotion and we get her dry & put warm clothes on her upper body. After that I realise that there is no use in anything but to hug this little girl until she warms up. At some stage by the grace of God she starts even smiling & I poke her nose, she laughs and I realise it’s not me getting her through it, it’s her getting me through it. We get the family at last into the bus to Moria, and the next boat arrives”





JIM KROFT ON HIS PHOTOS

"My friend Paco from "Proem Aid" wades out into the water to bring in a punctured boat. One of those moments of heroism that happens everyday in the refugee crisis. These inspiring and positive human stories are often under reported. Paco is a 50 year old unpaid Spanish firefighter."

"A young man arrives on a new continent, with no possessions. He stares back out across the ocean. He sees a past that is gone, and a future that is unknown. And yet his eyes are glistening. I call him "James Dean" because in his face I saw an effortless courage."



"Each day in Idomeni people would ask me "when will the border open". As the days passed the tone turned from hope to despair. The refugees realised they were caught between worlds. This man represented a loneliness I'll never forget."

"Dusk sets in over the "Life Jacket Graveyard" on Lesbos. It felt like an otherworldly place, so full of stories - of survival, of life and of death. It seemed to evoke the imagery and light of Golgotha. It was one of many moments where the refugee crisis felt biblical in scale."





JIM KROFT ON JOURNEYS

"Human life is a journey. We are all born. We all die. What we do in between defines who we are, and how we are remembered. After years as a musician, I realized that I had been living with an unnamed frustration. I wanted to release more regularly than the traditional album cycle allows. I wanted to bring my music to people in reality rather than in the cyber world. More than that, I wanted connection, campfire, campervanning - to share my music behind the great firewall of China, the desert of the Sahara, and the long open roads of America.

What is music for? Had i forgotten? What are the colours of my dreams, the shape of my subconscious longings? I decided that in order to find my way, I needed to get lost, to set out into the unknown, and to hell with sense. As a result my »Journeys« project was born. It is an independent project - one man, one guitar, one camera. In a fractured and fragmented world, I've decided to seek its heart, and to find out for myself what its people think.

At my core I believe that human beings want to be unified, not divided, that we want to progress peacefully, that when measured in total it our kindness that will defeat our cruelty. In order to find out for myself, I have set out on my journey."

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