

# **OBEY ROBOTS**

“One In A Thousand” lyric book



DIGITAL SAMPLE

# HELLO, WORLD!

I don't understand how it can still be this hot. I reach out for another delicious fried morsel and take a sip of cold beer, exhaling lukewarm air up towards my sweaty forehead. The Hawker Centre is brightly lit and full of people. Long tables stretch out in all directions; families, friends, colleagues and strangers squeeze together on benches, talking loudly and gesticulating with hands and chopsticks.

It's 12th April 2019, and I'm celebrating after a week of mentoring music students at Tanglin Trust School in Singapore. Invited out by an old friend from Leeds, I've enjoyed a whirlwind of musical collaboration, and as very much NOT a teacher, I'm pleased with having got through this new experience successfully. Interesting music has been made, ideas, hopes and dreams have been warmly encouraged, and now my work is done I'm set to embark on a few days of exploring the city-state by myself, humidity depending.

I'm thoroughly enjoying dinner with my colleagues, soaking in the sights and sounds of this vibrant place...but I'm checking my phone. I have a good reason. Something is happening.



Kings Heath, 8th June 2011. I can't believe my eyes. Miles Hunt from The Wonder Stuff is sitting on a sofa two metres away from me. He's rehearsing a duet with another of my musical heroes, Carina Round, and his presence in the dressing room is a complete surprise.

Of course, I'm acting nonchalant. No biggie. In my life as a session musician I've found myself in all sorts of weird situations with famous persons, and always acted very professionally. I've never been a screamy sort of fan anyway, I respect a lot of artists and have been flushed and nervous to speak to a few people, but it's always been important to me not to make things weird.

Coming face to face with a songwriter whose work inspired a teenage me to try and start a band, though - that's a very funny feeling.

I deal with my funny feeling, and get on with the gig. I'm here at the legendary Hare & Hounds to sing backing vocals for Carina after she ran an online competition to find people - but we first met in 2007, when I made myself say a shy hello after she played at The Water Rats in London. Talk about funny feelings - hearing her album "The Disconnection" in 2005 directly kicked me up the bum to start making my first album a reality.

I'm not supposed to be here tonight. I was only invited to sing at the London show, but when I offered to make my own way to Birmingham Carina was really pleased. This decision, to pay my own train fare and stay with a friend after the show, was a "Sliding Doors" moment in my life. The decision to hand Erica Nockalls a copy of my debut album "Disarm" at the end of the night was another - I'd never done anything like that before. Miles and Erica listened to my music all the way home, and have been super supportive ever since.

Dreams can come true.



Speaking of...in Singapore, on 12th April 2019, I check my phone again. He's written back. Miles has been messaging me about writing music with the guitarist from a band I discovered on a mixtape in 1997. I'm excited - not just because Miles freaking Hunt is writing to me (even after 8 years of being in touch, I'm not ready to take *that* for granted), but because Ned's Atomic Dustbin made some of the most exciting tracks of my teenage years.

How is it that one of their members is interested in working with me?

I find out later that Rat stumbled across my She Makes War video for "Drown Me Out" on a YouTube binge. The sidebar next to a Ting Tings video led to me - and now, the rest is history.

Another "Sliding Doors" moment (seriously, it's a great film!): the video Rat saw was my second attempt. In 2015 I was experimenting with letting someone else direct a music video for me, so we spent an entire sunny day shooting footage in a forest in Bristol. There was a boat sitting amongst the trees. There was running. There was jumping. I even snuck over a fence to submerge myself, fully clothed, in a lake. There was a whole separate morning spent with a green screen. Sounds terrible...and it was.

When I watched the footage back, my heart sank. It just wasn't right. It was awkward, but I scrapped the whole thing. I couldn't let anyone see that mess. I lost interest in making a video for that song for a few months, then decided to take back my role as director and try something different.

I used my late Grandad's typewriter to type the song's lyrics onto coloured paper, and folded the sheets into origami boats. I borrowed a friend's cafe for a morning, hung out with some ducks by the River Avon, and set off marine flares in the park near my house at dusk. I love that video, and it means a lot that it's the one Rat found on his YouTube explorations.



29th April 2019. The flight home is VERY long, but I have everything I need. I keep my earphones in the whole time, listening round and round to the 13 acoustic tracks Rat sent over. They're not songs yet, but he has a particular style of playing that immediately suggests melodies to me. I hope I can remember them when I get back.

I submerge myself in his musical world, and wonder how I can bring my own up to meet it. I think about a songwriting prompt I used with the kids in Singapore, writing it in block letters on the classroom whiteboard:

**WHAT WOULD** [insert band / artist / producer name here] **DO?**

I'm thinking REM, I'm thinking XTC, I'm thinking Queens Of The Stone Age. If I was in one of those bands, what songs would I write with this great guitar material as a starting point? I ponder.

I wonder if Rat wants to make some sort of country folk album - these *are* recordings of acoustic guitars, after all. I definitely don't want to make that kind of music, but I do want to make music with him.

Back in the UK, a tentative email back and forth begins. Rat *doesn't* want to make some sort of country folk album. I'm relieved.

I drive up to the Midlands for a day to say hello in person, and drink cups of tea, and awkwardly sing over a few of Rat's demos. I generally prefer to try things out alone, but it's great to meet. I drive home and try to figure out what to do next.

It's been a long time since I've done any musical collaboration - the time it took to make four solo albums, to be precise - so it takes me a while to come back around to the idea that I always come back around to: all I can ever really do is be myself.

Very "Wizard Of Oz", I know.

I soon realise that when Rat says he's open to "anything", he means it. I set to work using his parts as source material, cutting bits up and moving them around to accommodate the vocal melodies I'm coming up with.

Many guitarists would not welcome this sort of behaviour, but Rat always says he's most interested in the song, not himself. He's one of the few guitarists I've worked with who doesn't keep asking for *his* parts to be louder in the mix...and louder...and louder...

I send him some *\*really\** weird stuff, and he is always delighted. This is fun.



28th July 2021. I feel...odd - but I have songs to work on, so I'm balancing my laptop on a bent knee while I burrow into the sofa, wrapped in a duvet. The second Moderna jab is having some strange effects.

I hum along to the piece of music that will become "Old Kindnesses". I program some drums. I create a gap for an instrumental and fill it with weird sounds. I figure out some words. I trust my instincts.

The afternoon passes in a hazy blur, but by the end of it a new song exists. I try - and fail - to figure out exactly what I've done, shrug, and send it to Rat.



**Rat Rat** <picnichamps@outlook.com>  
to Laura ▾

Wed, 28 Jul 2021, 18:59 ☆ ↶ ⋮

OH MY GOD THAT SOUNDS AMAZING !!!!!!!!

5th February 2023. It's less than three weeks until the album comes out, and it's been a pleasure to look back over the past few years and share some memories with you here. It hasn't been an easy four years for any of us, and the fact that Rat and I managed to complete this body of work and overcome some major obstacles to be able to share it with you makes me very proud.

Music making is never easy, and isn't any sort of party situation. It's a peculiar blend of dragging emotions up from the depths of yourself, finding ways to work with other humans, fighting your inner critic, trusting your gut and many, many hours of sitting in front of a computer. It's a really, really weird thing to do - but I love it.

Huge thanks to Rat for finding me on the internet and for trusting my creative ideas. Look what we made! My favourite moments during our time working together so far have been seeing how delighted you are at the results and witnessing your ever-growing creative confidence. You really raised the bar on the robot creation front. Top moves!

Huge thanks also to Miles Hunt for 12 years of friendship, for putting Rat and I in touch, and for upping the stakes at the very start of this project:

12/04/2019, 10:53

MH: If I wasn't already neck deep in the writing and recording of the new TWS album I would be happy to co-write with him. [*No, Miles, no!*]

12/04/2019, 15:06

LK: Hey there! My word I would LOVE to do this!!!!

12/04/2019, 16:06

MH: Superb news. I expect hits! X

This from the man behind 3 top 5 albums...



What if I hadn't made myself say hello to Carina Round after her gig in 2007?

What if I hadn't handed my CD to Erica after the Hare & Hounds show?

What if I hadn't had a second go at making a video for "Drown Me Out"?

What if my first bandmate hadn't put "Kill Your Television" on that mixtape in 1997?

Some little moments turn out to be big ones when we look back at our lives, and I'm always grateful for the quiet voice inside that tells me what I should be doing. My job is to listen, to respond and to be the very most me I can be.

I'll forget this as soon as I start working on something new, I'm sure, but I'll always keep trying to remember. I hope you do, too.

Thank you so much for supporting Obey Robots!

Love,  
Laura xxx



IT'S WEDNESDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, AND LAURA'S JUST BEEN WITH ME SHOOTING THE "LET IT SHOW" VIDEO. LAURA HAS A GREAT IDEA, ONE OF HUNDREDS I MIGHT ADD, FOR US BOTH TO WRITE A LETTER FOR THE "ONE IN A THOUSAND" LYRIC BOOK. HERE GOES...

DEAR READER,

THIS JOURNEY STARTED FOR ME ON FRIDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2019. STANDING WITH MILO OUTSIDE THE MANCHESTER RITE, ON THE SECOND LAURE FROM STOURBRIDGE TOUR WITH THE NEOS, I HEARD THE WORDS "LAURA SAID YES". PANIC SET IN 30 SECONDS LATER.

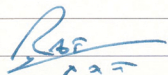
AFTER MORE THAN 30 YEARS, I HAD NO IDEA HOW TO EVEN BEGIN WORKING ON A MUSICAL PROJECT, LET ALONE WITH SOMEONE I'D NEVER EVEN SPOKEN TO YET. THAT WAS ONE NERVY FIRST EMAIL I SENT TO LAURA...

AS I SIT HERE WRITING THIS LETTER, I'M THINKING OF WHAT WE'VE BOTH BEEN THROUGH OVER THE PAST 4 YEARS. THE OBEI ROBERTS ALBUM "ONE IN A THOUSAND" IS ALL READY FOR RELEASE, SOMETHING TO SHOW FOR ALL THE ISOLATION, EMOTIONAL TURMOIL AND DOGGED HARD WORK.

I COULD WRITE PAGES ABOUT THOSE YEARS, BUT FOR NOW I JUST WANT TO SAY HOW OVERLY TECHNICALLY HAPPY I AM. THE ALBUM BY FAR EXCEEDS ANYTHING I THOUGHT IT COULD BE. I HAVE LITERALLY HAD IT ON REPEAT SINCE THE FINAL MIXES ARRIVED.

I WANT TO SAY THANKS TOO TO LAURA, WHO'S TALENTS ARE UNMATCHED IN ANY ROOM ELSE I KNOW, AND THANKS TOO TO YOU, FOR SUPPORTING US FROM THE MOMENT WE STARTED RELEASING SONGS FOR YOUR ENJOYMENT

LOVE YOU ALL,

  
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