

"Count Me In"..... The Story Behind the Song

May of 2018: JD and I were in the mountains of Virginia at a songwriting retreat with fellow positive music friends. Glen Roethel and I were sent off to write together....with his guitar, some strong English Breakfast tea for me, and a cheery "Have Fun" from the other writers.

Glen is a prolific songwriter and visual artist...a sweetheart guy, great guitar player, and open and creative soul. He knows a million old songs, and he has a quick and fluid attitude with both words and music. The two of us had already written a fun tongue-in-cheek tune called "Christmas Bossa Nova," which JD and I included in our Holiday album "All These Gifts" in 2016.

So, Glen and I found a friendly spot, and meandered around for awhile through ideas from a dozen musical styles. But there were too many options. We finally gave up trying too hard, and just relaxed into a playful and jazzy blues feel.

When you're playing with other musicians, every time you begin a song, you have to get on the same page rhythmically, and agree when to start, and how fast to go. It's called "counting in." One of the musicians says "1...2..., 1, 2, 3, 4" and then everybody can start playing together.

As we were working on this song, and having to start over endlessly, I kept telling Glen to count me in. And then we realized, after about the tenth time, hey, like, that's another way of saying "I'm on your team. Let's play together. If you're asking for volunteers, you can count me in."

Hahaha, A little musical pun....

This song quickly came together after that, in a fun back & forth, with lyrics flying, and the melody easily taking shape on top of his effortless guitar licks. But eventually Glen and I ran out of time, and so we had to leave the song somewhat unfinished, agreeing to stay open to ideas that might show up at a later date.

Once I got back home to Colorado, JD and I started working in earnest putting together this "Better Angels" album, although we were still months away from settling on that name and the Abe Lincoln quote that inspired it. We just knew that we were profoundly upset by the disastrous direction our national politics were heading, and we felt like we had to offer alternatives to the divisive and combative standoffs dominating the scene.

We also began to feel like we needed to lighten up a little.

So, I began to imagine how people on opposite sides of an issue might come together and work out creative solutions to solve larger problems, in spite of their entrenched personal and ideological differences. This would look like both sides agreeing to shift out of combat mode: Trying cooperation instead of competition. Loosening up a little. Getting out of the way and allowing a higher vision to show up through some creative back-and-forth.

And it dawned on me....This is exactly what happens in great musical improvisation. You agree to set up a structure, and then you bring your skills and experience together, listening closely and openly to each other to see what might show up. You let go of having to be right, and you see what wants to happen in the moment. It's not about ownership or credit. You're too busy playing together to care about who thought of what. Then what opens up is a creative space where everybody can contribute something beyond what they thought they knew, and discover options that hadn't existed before.

So, the words to this song came together from that place. And wouldn't it be hilarious and helpful if our leaders (and all the rest of us too, for that matter) could hear the message and take it to heart.