

Chicago River Album Songs Text

All songs:

Words, Music, Vocals, 6-string guitar: Lee

Not Knowing (Intro) (2017)

A bit of noise.

Recording: Tom

Mix: Ryan

Chicago River (2015)

The first writing exercise at the first-ever meeting of Words on Water, founded by Gwen Mayes, was to write about a place we lived near water. "Chicago River" grew out of that exercise.

12-string guitar: Lee

Percussion: Ryan

Flute: Kim

Recording: Tom (vocal)

Recording: Ryan (guitars, flute, percussion)

Mix: Ryan

To Be Afraid (2017)

I was so traumatized by my eighth-grade nun that I've forgotten her name. I very unfairly used the name of my seventh-grade nun in this song.

Recording and Mixing: Ryan

Math Lab (2017)

My high school's math lab was my safe haven.

Recording and Mixing: Ryan

I Love to See (1970)

This little ditty about life in the dorm is one of my earliest fragments, before I figured out how to write a whole song. In 2017 the University of Illinois put the sounds of the carillon in the math building, Altgeld Hall, online. I incorporated them into this recording. I love the juxtaposition of serious math and dorm silliness.

Recording: Tom

Mix: Tom & Ryan (chimes)

City Cat (1977)

I wrote this when I lived in Chicago and would perform open mic at Somebody Else's Troubles. Little did I know that I was a future cat fan.

Recording and Mixing: Tom

In and Out of Love (1989)

I think this was me trying to write a different love song. I'm not sure which of several friends' love lives inspired it. With the decadence of a fade-out ending!

Percussion: Ryan
Recording: Tom
Mix: Ryan

Southern Indiana (1970 and 2013)

One day in college I was so frustrated at my inability to finish a song I decided to write a complete song, no matter how short, simple, and lousy, that very day. I looked to my roommate, recently engaged to be married, and wrote what I called "Gibson City Wedding Song," but which everyone else called "Granny." I hated it but my family loved it and forced me to play it for years. In 2013, when I lived in Bloomington, Indiana, I added the "Southern Indiana" parts and don't hate the combination nearly as much.

Recording: Tom
Mix: Ryan

Forget Cleveland (1994)

A Midwest guy is worried that his girlfriend will be so taken by her first business trip to the big city that she won't come home to him. No idea what inspired this.

Keyboards: Josh
Recording: Tom
Mix: Eli

Whoever Lives Here Now (1996)

Once I decided the theme of this album was "home / time & place," I remembered this song from 1996, about being stuck in a detour near my ex's old apartment. All I had was a lyric sheet with chords, so I had to reconstruct the melody. I was surprised by notes on the lyric sheet: "hurdy-gurdy in Cm" and "Look at Sean." This suggests that Bob (hurdy-gurdy) and Sean (recorder) and I actually performed this nearly-forgotten piece.

Recording and Mixing: Tom

I'd Rather Live in Chicago (1977)

I love living in the heart of the big city but Fate wants me to reside in suburbia. I love walking to the library and grocery store but Fate wants me to drive there.

Recording: Tom
Mix: Ryan

Exit 27 (2013)

I wrote this on one of many long drives from Indiana to Maryland, thinking about superhighways and EXIT signs and trucks.

Recording and Mixing: Tom

I'm Here You're There (1999)

Definitely inspired by my husband Bob's many trips. But as I often say, my songs are inspired by facets of my life but are not my diary: considerations like rhythm and rhyme and making things interesting trump truth.

Recording and Mixing: Tom

Stay Outta My Space (2017)

The gym is a pain in so many ways. This started as an essay but morphed into a song. At one point it was all sung but I replaced the most boring sung parts with spoken word. At one point the young women were an old guy's stereotype but my friend Carrie suggested I could do better, so I rewrote them and the narrator.

Recording and Mixing: Ryan

Paradise (2017)

I wrote this while working out in the pool at our resort in Cancun, which is nothing like the place described in the song.

Percussion: Ryan

Recording and Mixing: Ryan

Float Little Snowflake (1979)

I didn't play this much until recently. I think I considered it way uncool. But now I'm so old I'm beyond cool. This was my mother-in-law Tutu's (Hawaiian for "grandparent") second-favorite song of mine. I sang it at her funeral.

Ukuleles: Lee & Bob

Keyboards: Josh

Sleigh bells: Ryan

Recording: Tom (vocal, Lee's uke)

Recording: Ryan (guitar, Bob's uke)

Mix: Ryan

Joan Bone (1978)

I don't know why I wrote a song about my thin sister-in-law Joan and her sisters. I don't know why anyone outside my immediate family would like it, but people do. It was Tutu's favorite song of mine—she made me promise to sing it at her funeral.

Recording and Mixing: Tom

Assisted Living (2017)

Tutu lived to be 100 years old. Whereas I usually feel free to invent things, every detail of this is true.

12-string guitar: Lee

Recording and Mixing: Ryan

Not Knowing (1972)

How strange that at age 21 I was waxing nostalgic about childhood.

Recording: Tom

Mix: Ryan

I Gotta Have My Key (1979)

I'm a serious homebody. I'd be happy never to leave this house.

Recording: Tom

Mix: Ryan

Bob: Robert Green

Eli: Eli Kelly

Josh: Josh Lilly

Kim: Kim Gravatt

Ryan: Ryan M. Cullen of Annapolis Audio Lab **Tom:** Tom Yeiser of Sweet Owen Sound