



Matthew Heller

Temple Moon Desire

Matthew Heller's *Temple Moon Desire* is a record imbued with compassion born of tragedy. Together with producer David Pollock (CAKE, Wild Ones), Heller worked to create a group of songs that challenges listeners to learn to love in the face of strife and work to cultivate the nascent empathy and love that is there within us all, no matter how deeply it may seem to be buried.

Heller learned compassion at a young age from his mother who, despite her drug addiction, always had space in her home for undocumented people in the community. Spending time with these folks and hearing their struggles taught Heller about the lack of empathy with which police and immigration go about their work in the War on Drugs.

In 2015, Heller had just released the guitar-centric rock EP *Tragedy Town* when longtime friend Pollock issued a challenge: try writing from someone else's perspective. While contemplating how to approach this task Heller happened on an episode of *Democracy Now!* wherein a refugee was asked; "What do survivors of war need to live happily?" This resonated deeply. He wrote it down and thought about it.

Heller began researching the war in Afghanistan. In a BBC documentary, he found a scene of a very young woman riding a horse for the first time (the very act was forbidden). He felt compelled, against all odds, to try and reach her. Heller scanned the credits, opened a web browser, and, miraculously, there she was.

Overjoyed, he reached out. Mehri Azizi was only a few years younger than Heller. She had gone to college in Iran, was engaged, and was a respected journalist. She was also happy to interview people around Kabul on his behalf. On Jan 21st, 2016, Aziz was commuting to work when a Taliban suicide bomber murdered Mehri Azizi and six of her colleagues. She was 22. She spoke English, French, Arabic, Pashtun, and Farsi. She was a journalist, cinematographer, and writer.

Heller was devastated. How could the war have become so uncontrollable, so uncontained, so hysterically overwhelming? Yet be portrayed by Western media as basically over? Heller thought. He thought about a broken system, here in America, at the pentagon and the White House, that instigated an era of secular warfare in Afghanistan, that sucked in every aspect of livability from Afghanistan, and all the bright, hopeful people in the country. There, in his little room in Portland, OR, he sat with his cat and his thoughts.

In the middle of tracking for *Temple Moon Desire*, Heller and Pollock traveled south to escape the dreary Pacific Northwest winter and found themselves working at Sonic Ranch in Tornillo, Texas just as the city became a hotbed for political action. Now infamous for imprisoning refugee children, the tension was palpable.

"We knew we had to make a record that was like an anchor" says Heller. "It had to plunge into darkness, it had to be heavy, yet also strong." One of the songs on the record feels apropos; the main line is ""it's impossible to learn to love, with a wall between us"

All these experiences led Heller to a profound observation: "It takes strength to have compassion for other people. Mehri took my questions into homes, farms, and army barracks, and she did so with unflinching bravery." Compassion is an innate human trait, Heller says, that we all possess. Nobody lacks compassion, but everybody can nurture it and let it grow. There is no limit to compassion. Compassion sees no enemies or borders. Looking at the world through the eye of compassion eliminates our differences. Heller hopes that the message of *Temple Moon Desire* will help others nurture the seed of compassion that grows within them.