



## MICHAEL CHAPMAN

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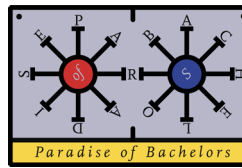
**50**

- + **label:** Paradise of Bachelors
- + **catalog number:** PoB-29
- + **formats:** LP / CD / digital (vinyl not returnable)
- + **release date:** January 20, 2017
- + **UPC-LP / UPC-CD:** 616892414445 / 616892414544
- + **genre(s):** Alternative / folk-rock
- + **territory restrictions:** N/A
- + **LP / CD box lots:** 25 / 40

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| A1. "A Spanish Incident (Ramón & Durango)" 5:05 | B2. "Falling from Grace" 6:32                  |
| A2. "Sometimes You Just Drive" 4:41             | B3. "Money Trouble" 4:33                       |
| A3. "The Mallard" 5:45                          | B4. "That Time of Night" 6:11                  |
| A4. "Memphis in Winter" 6:50                    | X1. "Rosh Pina" 5:07 (CD/digital bonus track)  |
| B1. "The Prospector" 6:39                       | X2. "Navigation" 5:14 (CD/digital bonus track) |

- + Michael Chapman's first "American record" was produced by **Steve Gunn** and features a band comprised of Gunn, **Nathan Bowles**, **James Elkington**, **Jimmy SeiTang**, **Jason Meagher**, and the incomparable **Bridget St John**. It is his first album with a full band and to include new songs in years.
- + Available on **140g virgin vinyl** as an LP, with heavy-duty **tip-on jacket**, **printed inner sleeve**, **lyrics** and **download code** for the entire album and **bonus tracks "Rosh Pina" and "Navigation."**
- + **CD edition** features heavy-duty **gatefold jacket**, **lyrics**, and **bonus tracks "Rosh Pina" and "Navigation."**
- + For more information and album trailer: <http://www.paradiseofbachelors.com/pob-29>
- + PoB artist page and tour dates: <http://www.paradiseofbachelors.com/michael-chapman>

- + Mesmeric. Chapman's appealingly leathery, lived-in voice takes a backward glance at a long line of memories that are part of a "thread that can't be broken" running through all of our lives. After 75 years on the planet, Chapman may have developed a thick skin, but the soul inside of it can still speak to the uncertainty that lives in all of us. - **NPR Music's Songs We Love**
- + A master guitarist and songwriter ... The godfather of experimental rock guitar. - **MOJO**
- + A world-class songwriter. Terrifically unpredictable ... beyond any genre tag. - **Pitchfork**
- + Acute emotional reporting in a gruff seaman-poet's voice, supported by the ingenious strength of his guitar. - **Rolling Stone**
- + A master ... a distinctive talent who stands comparisons to John Fahey. - **Uncut**
- + The sound of a real songwriter who's lived a real life and all that entails. - **Q**
- + He shreds on acoustic guitar the way Kandinsky wails with a paintbrush. - **Thurston Moore**
- + His endless drive and unique voice serve as a model of what it means to be an artist. - **Steve Gunn**
- + Michael Chapman is a titanic guitar picker and personality ... heroic and inspiring. - **William Tyler**
- + 48 years my brother through music ... He is always authentic in his writing, playing, and singing—what you get is who he is. Truly a fully qualified survivor. - **Bridget St John**



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After five decades of recording and touring, veteran British songwriter and guitar sage **Michael Chapman** has finally made what he calls his "American record," and the aptly titled **50** now stands as his late career masterpiece, a moving legacy statement by a legend. Backed by a collaborative group of friends and acolytes—**Steve Gunn** (who also produced), **Nathan Bowles (Pelt)**, **James Elkington (Jeff Tweedy)**, **Jason Meagher (No-Neck Blues Band)**, **Jimmy SeiTang (Rhyton)**, and fellow UK songwriting luminary **Bridget St John**—Chapman tears into both bold renderings of new songs and radical reinterpretations of material from his revered catalog, the crack band adeptly scaling the same rarefied sonic heights of classic **Harvest** albums like **Fully Qualified Survivor**, guided by a true survivor's instinct, wit, and wisdom. The result is a sublime chiaroscuro self-portrait, more shadow than light, as an invigorated Chapman wrestles with weighty themes of travel, memory, mortality, and redemption, his world-weary whispers assuming the incandescent power of prophecy.

*I dreamed the blacksnake rode the guitar / Down the river - Frank Stanford, "The Singing Knives" (1971)*

The poems of **Frank Stanford** manifest a febrile surrealist blues of the American South, especially when exploring his favorite themes of nature, music, and death, a symbolic trinity invoked succinctly by his couplet about a snake adrift on a river, coiled in the soundhole of a guitar-ark. Orphic guitarists (and snakes) recur in Stanford's work, in which he consistently associates the twin mysteries of mortality and music: "The one in front had a guitar on his back/The other one had a chainsaw," begins one harrowing passage from "The Snake Doctors."

The stowaway snake and the guitar-chainsaw duo offer apt metaphors for iconic British songwriter and guitarist **Michael Chapman's** music, suffused (like Stanford's work) with the crooked logic, unfulfilled longing, and existential danger of dreams, but shaded with his own wry sensibility of Northern darkness. He ranks among the innovative midcentury English guitarists—**Davey Graham**, **Richard Thompson**, and Michael's old friend **Mike Cooper** are others—who transposed the atmosphere and syntax of the blues to a British context through reinvention and deconstruction rather than imitation. But Chapman uniquely deploys his liquid virtuosity and his resonant, slurred **Yorkshire** burr as vehicles for his mournful (and often barbed) musings on the pleasures and perils of hard living. Like a peaty whiskey (or **Bob Dylan**), the smoky gravitas of his playing and singing has grown more trenchant and entrenched with age; no one else sounds like him.

It's difficult not to describe Michael's long career and his vast, masterful body of work obliquely, by reeling off his musical genealogy, the astounding roll call of collaborators, comrades, and disciples with whom he's shared stages, studios, and his sturdy songs. His emergence in 1967, alongside **Wizz Jones**, as a self-taught jazz freak, recovering art-school student, and part-time photography teacher on the Cornish folk circuit preceded a series of classic late 1960s and '70s albums for **Harvest**, **Deram**, and **Decca**. (But whatever you do, don't call him a folkie; he feels more kinship with the improvisatory outer orbits of jazz, blues, and the avant-garde.)

A peer of legends like **Bert Jansch**, **John Renbourn**, and **Roy Harper**—but arguably more mercurial and less classifiable over the long haul than any of them—Chapman is probably the only musician in history to have played and recorded with **Mick Ronson**, **Elton John**, and **Thurston Moore**. (True stories: **David Bowie** enlisted Ronson in the **Spiders from Mars** as a direct result of his superb playing on Chapman's **Fully Qualified Survivor**, **John Peel's** favorite album of 1970. Elton John tried to recruit Michael to his band thereafter, but producer **Gus Dudgeon** interfered.) Following a millennial resurgence and reissue campaigns by the **Light in the Attic** and **Tompkins Square** labels, Michael's songs have recently been covered by **Lucinda Williams**, **Kurt Vile**, **Hiss Golden Messenger**, **Meg Baird**, and **William Tyler**, and he has performed and toured with younger devotees including **Bill Callahan**, **Jack Rose**, **Daniel Bachman**, and **Ryley Walker**. But this litany of comrades and admirers is only one vector by which to chart the undiluted potency of Chapman's artistry and its deep currents of influence on three generations of musicians.

His new record **50**, titled to commemorate fifty years of touring—and released four days before Michael's seventy-sixth birthday—stands as a formidable monument of retrospection and introspection in his adventurous catalog (last we counted, approaching fifty records.) A return to the gloriously ragged kineticism of **Rainmaker (1969)**, **Fully Qualified Survivor (1970)**, **Wrecked Again (1971)**, and **Savage Amusement (1976)**, Michael's first "American record"—an elusive goal for decades—embodies his undeniable late career masterpiece. It is his first album in years with a full band, assembled around the versatile core group of friend and producer **Steve Gunn** (who also contributes guitar, drums, and vocals); **Nathan Bowles** (drums, banjo, keys, vocals); **Pelt**, **Black Twig Pickers**; **James Elkington** (guitar, piano); **Jeff Tweedy**, **Richard Thompson**, and **Jimmy SeiTang** (bass, synthesizers, vocals); **Rhyton**, **Stygian Stride**, Michael's dear friend and fellow UK songwriting luminary **Bridget St John** furnished her gorgeous, shivering vocals, a dramatic counterpoint to Chapman's road-worn gruffness. Gunn's touring bassist and longtime engineer **Jason Meagher (No-Neck Blues Band)** recorded and mixed at his **Black Dirt Studio** in **Westtown, New York**. The inherently collaborative nature of **50** shows in its ambition and execution; never has Michael ceded such generous control to other musicians, and he sounds both invigorated and liberated as a result. Gunn's and Elkington's guitars knit with Chapman's in easy intergenerational dialogue; sparks fly.

The album includes both radical reinterpretations of obscure material from Michael's catalog as well as three new compositions: "Sometimes You Just Drive," "Money Trouble," and "Rosh Pina." A longstanding but freshly urgent preoccupation with (as Michael sings in a beloved early tune) "time past and time passing" is evident straightaway, from the album title and the first line of the first song through the final lyric of the record. Never before in his storied career has Chapman gazed so steadily into the abyss of time lost and regained; never before has he engaged so intimately with his legacy and the changing meanings of his own music over time. That he manages to do so without succumbing to nostalgia or sentimentality bears testament to the steely fortitude of his ruminative, tough-minded songs, which survey both inscape and landscape with the same stoical detachment.

Chapman's spare writing on **50** displays a refined economy of gesture, often unfolding in episodic parables (see "The Prospector" and "A Spanish Incident"), wherein regret and redemption elide symbolically in a sublime chiaroscuro self-portrait, more shadow than light. His world-weary whispers assuming the incandescent power of prophecy. The boozey good humor and resignation of "Money Trouble" and "A Spanish Incident" find traces of comedy and camaraderie amid the absurdity of a world in which we lose our words, our way, our faith. The menace and anxiety of "Sometimes You Just Drive," which poignantly conflates the End of Days with the end of one man's days, and "Memphis in Winter," a hellish Bluff City travelogue, contrast with the naked vulnerability and remorse of "Falling from Grace" and "Navigation." In lead single "That Time of Night" Michael confesses, movingly, "you know I don't scare easy, but I do get scared."

With **50**, Chapman faces mortality with both guitar and chainsaw in hand, and endures. It's the unguarded sound of Orpheus descending, the snake riding the guitar down the river Styx and returning upstream to tell his story. Listen.



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