JESSE HARRIS
PICTURES
Liner Notes

My previous album, *If You Believed in Me*, also featured an orchestra arranged and conducted by Maycon Ananias. It might have had the addition Vol. 1 to its title, because this new one, Pictures, would certainly be Vol. 2. Before the former was even released, we picked up where we left off.

Due to visa issues, Maycon had relocated from Tallinn to Istanbul, whence he commuted to St. Petersburg for the orchestra sessions.

I myself recorded the majority of the new songs at my home studio, in New York City, playing most of the guitar, bass and keyboard parts. The first song, ”Pressed for Time,” was also the last to be finished, because at the mixing stage, Gabi Hartmann added harmonies and vocal arrangements. Her rhythmic intro is meant to evoke a ticking clock, and her final "*Time...*" the ghost of Time itself (at least that’s how I perceive it).

The songwriting process was new for me, in that many of the lyrics came first, before the music — sometimes in their entirety. I wrote "It Was Fun” and “Pictures” as poems, on the same flight from Tokyo to New York, after a Japan tour in October, 2025. Once back home with my guitar, I added melodies and chords.

Several of the songs made in this way sound very folk, in the sense of Old America; for example, “JT LeRoy,” with its acoustic guitar, harmonica, tambourine, harmonium and harmony vocals (sung plaintively by Sedona), could be from a hundred years ago. For orchestral references, I sent Maycon recordings of Frank Sinatra singing "Ole Man River" and *Billy the Kid*, by Aaron Copland.

The story of JT LeRoy had always fascinated me. He was meant to be a young, blond kid who'd grown up as a child prostitute in truck stops, with a brilliance for literature and rock music. But he turned out to be the invention of a couple in their 40s. In the press photos a female friend of the actual writer and actual musician would pose as JT with her hair in her face, wearing big, dark sunglasses and a pendant of a raccoon's pubic bone on a chain.

Long before the jig was up, I first heard about him in a New York Times article that occupied the front page of the Sunday Arts section, sometime in 2004, hailing him as the voice of a new generation, adored by legendary rock stars, all pen pals of the literary

prodigy. The books, in my opinion, did not live up the hype, though the title of one, The Heart is Deceitful Above All Things, impressed me; however, even this, I later discovered, was copied straight from John Rechy's *City of Night* (1963). Around the time of the article, a friend of mine recalled being invited to JT's musical performances but never meeting him — afterwards JT wouldn't be there for one reason or another (thus the first line of the song, "You came to meet JT LeRoy, but he wasn't here" — "here" rather than "there," not only because JT was not *there* in the physical sense of place, he was also not *here* on this earth).

The song "Pictures" also time travels, particularly at the moment Davell Crawford's piano enters; suddenly, we're in an old saloon. A native of New Orleans, he plays in a style deeply rooted in that culture (his grandfather wrote "Aiko Aiko"). Sébastien Vidal, of Artwork Records, had introduced us, asking me to help Davell finish recording his album. One day while overdubbing vocals, he said he needed a break and asked me to show him one of my new songs. We went over to my spinet piano, and I sang "Pictures." The piano was out of tune, but what he was playing was magical. With his gracious permission, I immediately set up some microphones and recorded his part.

Like "JT LeRoy," "Holy Man" is a another tale of charlatanism, but more obscure. One afternoon in LA, I was humming along to my guitar while Camila Doring painted, and she said, "Did you just sing, 'Holy man'?" I said I had, expecting a rebuff, but she said she liked it and wanted to write it with me. While she continued to paint, we finished the song there and then, in about a half hour.

"Tender" was the last song written and recorded for the album. Giorgia Laird, a young cabaret singer in Paris, whose dramatic vocal harmonies garland the track, said that she had been thinking of the word, Tender, and how it'd be nice in a song. We had a plan to meet, so before she arrived I wrote it. She helped me fine-tune the lyrics, and the next day we recorded the song in the home studio of Ulysse Cottin, in Paris. He and I have spent a lot of time making music together, ever since collaborating on his group Papooz's album, *Resonate*, and he played a large role in the production.

Another generous contribution came from Jesse Carmichael, of the band Maroon 5, who recorded the vocal/guitar of "Holy Man" and "Blowing Away" at his studio in LA. He also added overdubs of celeste, harmonium, piano and even drums, and helped to arrange Sedona's harmonies. I've known Jesse since 2017, and it was he, in fact, who first showed me Harry Nilsson's album, A Little Touch of Schmilsson in the Night, which, due

largely to Gordon Jenkins' arrangements, was a big influence on these two albums with Maycon Ananias.

Other overdubs, later added at my studio in New York, include: Nora Stanley's lovely saxophone and clarinet, and Töth and Will Graefe's vocal harmonies, on “Blowing Away;” Guilherme Monteiro’s guitars and bass, and Kenny Wollesen’s drums, on "A Moment in Your Life," which felt the most like a jazz standard and needed musicians well-versed in that vocabulary; Jeremy Gustin’s driving drum beats on "Holy Man" and "It Was Fun;” and Annalisa Noel’s ("Holy Man") and Sarah Pedinotti’s ("It Was Fun”) vocal harmonies.

One old song added to the collection, "Fool's Paradise," originally appeared on my 2009 album, *Watching the Sky*, and has since been recorded by several other singers: Petra Haden, Gabi Hartmann and Tony Scherr. I myself often perform it live and felt it deserved an orchestral treatment.

The majority of the other songs were written and recorded between September, 2025 and January, 2026.

As for the title, Pictures — each song is like a short story, a little world, a photograph of a moment. The actual pictures on the front and back cover, and in the rest of package, were taken by me at Joshua Tree with my 35mm Olympus point-and-shoot. Arriving in LA a day early for some West Coast shows in March, 2026, I found myself shut out of a hotel room (it turned out the Oscars were happening that night). So I drove out to the desert. Early the next morning the sunlight slanted across the landscape, and I shot most of a roll of film, including some self-portraits using the timer.

They say, never two without three. We’ll see. Meanwhile, I hope that Maycon and I can meet again in person for some live performances. We’ve now made two albums remotely without crossing paths even once.