

## **Cat Stevens' New Peace Train**

by  
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If I had one Christmas wish it would be that I wouldn't have to look at the world through 9/11 glasses. I wish the fear (that I keep denying) which has partially paralyzed my brain would go away so I would once again embrace the diversity of all people. I wish I wasn't suspicious of people who didn't look like me or believe like me. I wish every time I boarded a plane, I didn't find myself scanning for people I suspected of being Muslim terrorists. I wish I never had to hear that we have to kill them over there before they kill us over here.

But maybe Christmas came a little early for me this year. After a day of family festivities at our house, my brother who knew I had been a huge Cat Stevens when I was a kid surprised me by showing me the first commercial album Cat Stevens had released in over 25 years. Once upon a time in my little world, Cat Stevens was a unique singer who sang songs deep from within his soul like no other about finding peace and truth. While not all of Cat's songs were spiritual, he may have been the only popular artist I ever listened to who actually inspired me and made me think about a better world. I loved his passion. Thus it was a very sad day for me long, long ago when I learned that Cat Stevens had put down the guitar for good because he felt that was part of his new-found faith and Muslim calling. I never bought a Yusuf Islam (his new name) album because I heard they were all Muslim tunes with no guitar and I had no interest in that.

"You really ought to listen to this," my brother said. "Cat Stevens has picked up his guitar again," he continued. "Thanks but no thanks," I told my brother. "I don't feel like listening to a bunch of his baloney," But my brother left it behind maybe not so accidentally.

After everyone cleared out of our house, I walked over to the CD and quietly stared at it. I then popped it in our stereo, expecting to be thoroughly disappointed. Instead I was thunderstruck. His voice was still unmistakably distinctive and rich. He sounded just as he had over 25 years ago. But more importantly his songs were folksy, beautiful and went right to the soul. Words of peace seemed to flow through each song. And while a couple of the tunes definitely had an Islamic flavor, they formed a wonderful bridge of respect and understanding for me. Since I rarely encounter Muslim people in my insulated world, I guess you could say the fear of Muslims that I hate to admit had crept into my being since 9/11 began to dissipate. "Wow does the world need to listen to this." I told my wife who had been listening to the album as well. "This is a bridge that we so desperately need!"

Now before anyone runs out to buy this album, I am not suggesting your experience will be like mine. Maybe I'm just being followed by a Moonshadow. I have an appreciation for anyone who believes in their chosen faith passionately as long as they respect the

rights of others to believe as they wish. And while I don't share Yusuf Islam's faith direction, I have gained a genuine respect for what he is about all over again as he vehemently denounces 9/11 and England's tragic 7/7 while being an unabashed advocate for peace on his website.

The really interesting thing about the Cat is he is legit in two different worlds. He is respected in Muslim areas for turning his back on materialism while helping many charitable causes and establishing schools. And he is remembered fondly by millions of fans like me in our culture for his inspiring words.

Things in our world might get worse before they get better. How desperately we need someone like Cat Stevens to help get us past this Wild World and onto the Peace Train again.



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