

PERTH FESTIVAL 2016



Life's a steal for duo

Ara Jansen

Rob Garza seems both genuinely surprised and thrilled that his Washington DC electronic collective Thievery Corporation are celebrating their third decade together.

The DJ says he can't believe he's still making music and travelling the world.

"This was just a hobby for us," Garza says backstage before a hometown gig. "What I have been thinking about though is looking back and thinking it has been an exciting journey to work with music from all over the world."

"In the last few weeks we have been to Mexico, New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Washington. Every night is something new and you have to remember to stop and think 'Wow, this is unbelievable'."

Garza, Eric Hilton and their collective of supporting musicians started Thievery

Corporation in 1995 in Washington's 18th Street Lounge.

Defining a new genre of ambient electro, their smooth and chilled-out style borrows from all over the world, from acid jazz, dub and hip-hop to the bossa nova and Middle Eastern styles with albums often reflecting a current

interest or exploration in one style and language. They released their ninth studio album, *Saudade*, in 2014.

From the outset Garza and Hilton were determined to be in control of their

careers so they started their own label, 18th Street Lounge Music, and diversified.

"A lot of times we have chosen to get involved with other things outside music we love, like creating spaces: bars, restaurants and clubs," Garza says.

Hilton, still based in DC, is involved in 10 bars, clubs and restaurants — ranging from a British pub to a taqueria —

which have been responsible for transforming pockets of the city's nightlife.

Garza, who lives in San Francisco, has a busy solo career, multiple clubs and restaurants in the hip east coast Mexican town of Playa del Carmen (south of party town Cancun) and his own mezcals, Papadiablo.

"We've become very independent that way. The way Eric likes to put it is that we're in the bonus round."

"We never expected to have this career and everything is the icing on the cake and we don't stress out too much."

"We enjoy when we get together and make music and it's a joy to make records together but we don't need to pressure each other."

"When we go out and play, we can see and truly feel the love coming back at us from the fans. The fact that we don't have to do it makes it more enticing."

Thievery Corporation play Chevron Festival Gardens on February 13. Tickets from perthfestival.com.au.

Wistful troubadour finds balance in pop

Ara Jansen

A plain carpet sits quietly underfoot when William Fitzsimmons plays shows. There's no reason you should even notice it but it's important to the singer/songwriter's wellbeing.

That textile rectangle reminds Fitzsimmons that this is the place where he can express and share all the loss, sadness and heartache he has observed and lived through. These feelings exist firmly within that space and most of the time he successfully holds them there, not allowing them to bleed into his daily life.

"Balance is the right word for me," says the Illinois-based musician, best known for songs like *Passion Play* and *Please Don't Go*. "In the past five years my life has found balance, even though it's a moving target."

"It's really healthy for me to use music as a way to exorcise things that are confusing and upsetting for me, then I don't have to carry it around in other parts of my life."

Fitzsimmons, who comes to town for the Perth International Festival next month, released his first album in 2005 and last year put out his seventh, an EP homage to his home town, aptly titled *Pittsburgh*.

His wistful and elegant acoustic guitar-based pop revolves around events of his life, including his parents' divorce and then his own

(though he's now happily remarried with two children).

Fitzsimmons appreciates life's rawest, most undressed moments which are as breathtaking and mesmerising as they are devastating and hopeful, evident on the stark, live recording of one of the EP tracks, *Falling on My Sword*.

"I often wondered if all the magic was going to leave if I went to therapy," muses the former psychotherapist who started making music to heal himself. "Thank God I woke up because even if my art was the cost, it's my responsibility as a husband,

father and human being to do the best I can and live at peace with other people. It wasn't right for me to choose anxiety over health for the sake of artistry."

"I have really enjoyed the challenge of

writing things from a more stable perspective. The songs are not that much happier but it feels better and I'm grateful for that."

Fitzsimmons' challenge is to allow the good and the unhappy to peacefully co-exist, hence the carpet, which reminds him that he now always chooses health while safely visiting the lands of loss. In the process he creates universality, a space of shared experience.

"It's the space where I am allowed to have these feelings and still perform authentically. It means that 10 years on I can sing songs for an audience and not drown in them."



William Fitzsimmons plays Chevron Festival Gardens on February 14. Tickets from perthfestival.com.au.

'Every night is something new and you have to remember to stop and think 'Wow, this is unbelievable''

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