



PAPA DON'T PREACH

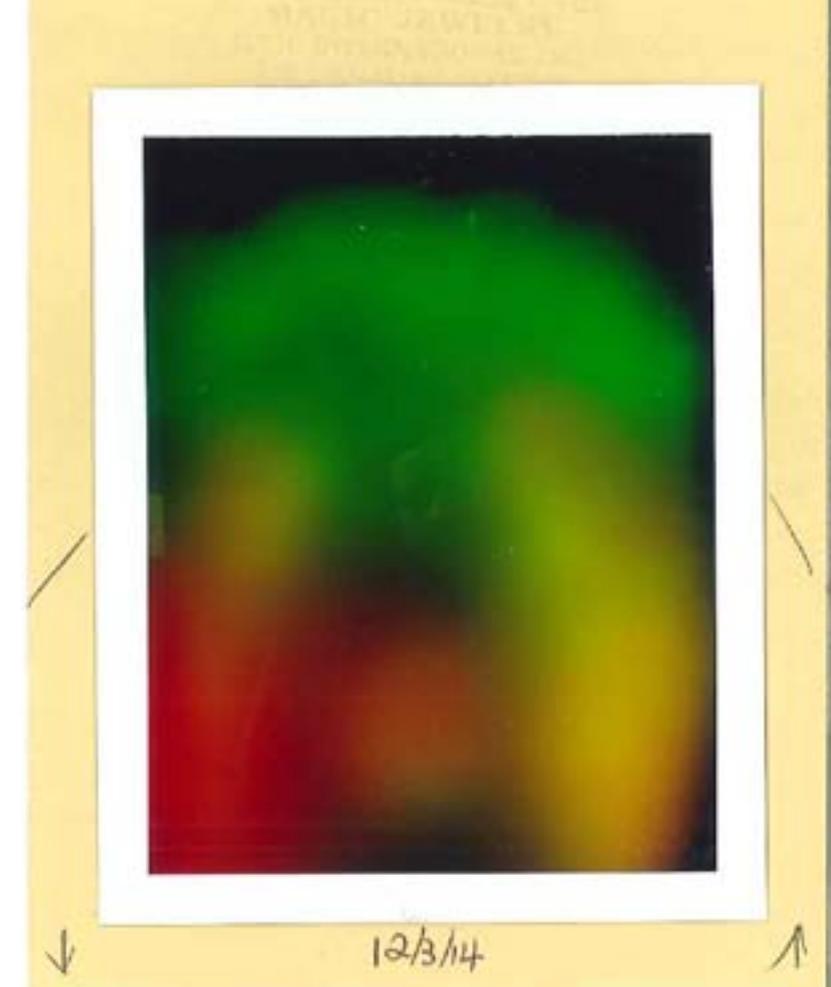
BUT FATHER JOHN MISTY CAN WRITE A DAMN FINE SONG—AND TAKE A “BETTER THAN AVERAGE” AURA PHOTO. BY CELIA SHATZMAN. PHOTOGRAPHED BY ANDI ELLOWAY

Joshua Tillman isn't afraid to admit his guilty pleasures. In the lobby of New York City's High Line Hotel on a rainy December afternoon, the former Fleet Foxes drummer who now performs as Father John Misty is quick to compliment the festive décor and even hum along to Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas Is You." With his rock star aesthetic—shaggy hair, long beard, oversize fur coat that would make Margot Tenenbaum green with envy—it's hard to tell if he's being ironic. And you get the feeling that happens a lot.

Minutes later, we're zipping down the West Side Highway in a cab when he admits his first musical infatuation: "I fell in love with Michael Bolton when I was in third or fourth grade. I had a friend whose mom was a huge fan. She would play his music every morning in the car, and I just thought it was the greatest sound I'd ever heard. I remember jamming out to "How Can We Be Lovers." That song really, really moved me at the time."

The blond balladeer's influence isn't exactly evident on Tillman's second album, *I Love You, Honeybear* (out February 10 on Sub Pop), with its melodic folk-rock pierced by intimate, acerbic lyrics. The accompanying listening instructions suggest ideal environments in which to enjoy each song, ranging from "one blazing hot August morning" to being in the company of "a bunch of dudes equipped with a God-given sixth sense to detect the faintest whiff of female loneliness." The songwriter was inspired by Yoko Ono's conceptual art as well as Zen koans. "With a lot of those riddles, there's no concrete answer—or you have to invert them in some way to resolve them. You can't answer with cleverness, and I guess that's some tendency that I have, to try to satirize. You can't really answer a koan with your ego intact."

But the plan for today is not just to talk about Tillman's music. We're en route to Chinatown to have his aura photographed and read. It's an



father john misty's aura photographed by magic jewelry.

interesting activity for someone who grew up in a strict Evangelical Christian household in what he describes as "a bleary little suburb" in Maryland outside of Washington, D.C. Secular pop culture was banned—which might help explain his earlier fascination with his friend's mom's carpool playlist.

Tillman's brother shared his passion, and early in high school they started a band, whose name he refuses to reveal. "I played drums, but I was determined to be the lead singer," says the now New Orleans-based Tillman. "I was like, 'Well, shit, you can't really write songs on the drums.'" So he picked up the guitar. "The purpose for me from the very beginning was to write songs." After a brief stint in college in upstate New York, he moved to Seattle to pursue music and eventually became the drummer of Fleet Foxes. But that didn't suit his initial ambitions, so about three years ago he left the band and became Father John Misty.

We enter Magic Jewelry—a no-frills tchotchke shop lined with glass cabinets housing crystals for sale—and Tillman is directed to a chair in the corner, where he sits while a woman snaps his special picture. As the instant film develops,

she declares that he has a "better than average" aura. A base color of indigo blue means he is sensitive and intuitive, with a possible tendency to overthink. He's creative, with strong feelings toward his own ideas, but he's a little overexerted these days. She advises him to rest, meditate, and surround himself with positive people.

So does Tillman buy it? "A lot of what she was touching on are practices or concerns that have been at the forefront of my mind over the last year," he says. "I'm into it. I don't swear by it, but there's definitely something about a holistic view of the body that is very appealing to me." He pauses for a moment, then jokes that his floppy fur coat was probably a dead giveaway for her prediction that he's a creative talent. But this isn't the last photo he'll take today.

Back at the hotel, we arrive just in time for the start of a children's Christmas party. Tillman makes a beeline for Santa Claus. "Can I get a picture with you?" he requests. "Maybe we could do one of those pointing at each other, like Tom Cruise and Steven Spielberg on the red carpet." They strike a pose as I snap away.