



John Geoffrey Gibbens was born on The Wirral in 1959; very much the youngest of three brothers. John's father, Geoffrey G Gibbens, studied at Oxford before becoming an English teacher. After a spell in Wallasey, he moved to Germany to teach at British Forces schools during John's early childhood before settling in West Cumbria, which provided the settings for many of John's poems

John met Armored Weston in the Lakes when he was 15. "When I met him he was all beauty and silent contemplation", she has said. She later became his lifelong creative partner.

Having resolutely decided to become a poet at a young age, John dropped out of Wyndham School and in 1977 travelled in Europe, finding a home in Deia, Mallorca where he worked in one of the local bars, meeting Robert Graves and a community of creative musicians, artisans and writers.

In 1978 John returned to the UK, moving to London, where John and Armored set up home, sharing not only in the body of his art but John also helping in the raising of Armored's children, Esme and John. His ability to reflect both the lightness and darkness of living came into John's poetry from his sensitive intellect as well as from the daily challenges of family life, and the struggle to survive as a poet.

John's mother Elizabeth had taught Journalism at Wyndham Comprehensive School in Egremont and passed on her skills to John: he deployed them in London, working firstly as a typesetter and later as a respected journalist on numerous major magazines and papers, including *Private Eye*, *The Oldie*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Telegraph* (for 12 years), *Financial Times* and, lastly, *The Wall Street Journal*.

In 1981 he became the youngest poet to receive an Eric Gregory Award. However, he remained aloof from the wider poetry scene, seeming to prefer looking out from the shadows whilst at the same time engaging with a wider community of artists, travellers and storytellers and always writing prolifically through the cycles of submissions and rejections.

Despite this, John's poems were published in *Poetry Review*, *Ostinato*, *Agenda*, *Fire* and many other magazines, and anthologies devoted to Elvis Presley, The Beatles, Bob Dylan, Edward Thomas, bicycles and peace, subjects with which he was deeply connected. His visual poetry was included in *The Reality Street Book of Sonnets* in 2008 and the exhibition Visual Poetics at The Poetry Library (Royal Festival Hall) in 2013.

## JOHN GIBBENS

### Collected Poems



John's *Collected Poems* were published in 2000 by Touched Press, "If you care about English language poetry and want to discover one of this generation's best poets ahead of the crowd, buy this book," Tony Grist wrote in *New Hope International Review*, and Michael Horovitz referred to it as "A magnificent book", while John Mingay wrote in *Stride*, "I can do little else but heap praise on Gibbens for his impeccable diction and use of language which holds surprises round every corner and is never at ease with the easy."

Smokestack Books published *Orpheus Ascending* in 2012. Like Rilke, Cocteau, Tennessee Williams, Salman Rushdie and Nick Cave, before him, Gibbens recasts the Orpheus myth in contemporary terms: this time in a strangely altered version of the London music scene in the late 1980s, a retro-future where violent unrest meets government backlash, and where pastoral idyll becomes a refuge from the currents of history.

John launched a series entitled *The Inkjet Books* in 2002, eventually numbering a couple of dozen titles; amongst them are several illuminated pamphlets.

## The Nightingale's Code

A poetic study  
of Bob Dylan



John Gibbens  
WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
Keith Baugh

After 10 years of work John published *The Nightingale's Code* (2001) with original photographs by *Keith Baugh*, (Touched Press, 2001), an in-depth poetic study of Bob Dylan. Amongst other praise, a reviewer in *Kirkus UK* wrote, "John Gibbens's passionate advocacy of one of the 20th century's greatest popular artists belongs among the best Dylan books", and Paula Radice called it "A gem amongst a lot of current fibreglass... essential reading", in *Freewheelin'*, while Emma Hagestadt in *The Independent* commented on its quality of "Perception without pretension... studded with sharp images and insights".

The creative partnership with Armored Weston resulted in the band *The Children*, featuring music written by John and Armored, which they recorded and performed over 12 years. Their debut album was *Play* (1999), and subsequent releases included *Come Aboard* and *Rockingham Street* (2002), *Love Walk* (2003) *Equals* (2007) and the double album *Memory of Grace* (2012).

John's only solo album, *Songs from the Red Note Book* appeared in 2014, and a recording of improvised music with Armored and poet and clarinetist David Miller was released as *Treetop Songs* by The Mind Shop in 2008. Details and sample recordings can be found on [www.touched.co.uk](http://www.touched.co.uk) (a website built by John, with a Lay for each day till 5 days before his death, the last poem being a song from the first album *Play: Meanwhile I'm Alive*).

John has left a legacy of 15 years of poetry since *The Collected Poems* were published, and over 100 songs yet to be released.