



**Richard Thompson**  
***Ship To Shore***  
**Biography**

“To be moving is better than to be standing still,” Richard Thompson says, and Richard Thompson should know. The influential singer-songwriter and virtuosic guitarist has been on a singular musical journey for over a half century, from his days in the ‘60s as a pioneer of British folk rock with Fairport Convention, to his seminal ‘70s duo work with Linda Thompson, to the exploratory, deeply emotional music of the solo career that has been his primary concern ever since.

Along the way he has been touted as one of the 100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time by Rolling Stone, covered by everyone from Robert Plant, R.E.M. and David Byrne to Sleater-Kinney, Bonnie Raitt and Emmylou Harris, bestowed with the Ivor Novello Award for songwriting, and even appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire by the late Queen Elizabeth II.

In 2018 Thompson released his 19th solo album, the critically-acclaimed *13 Rivers*, and now, five years later, he has followed it up with his latest communication, *Ship To Shore*. The time taken between these efforts is something like an eternity for the prolific artist, but there was a reason: “Covid kind of halted everything for two-and-a-half years,” he explains. But once Thompson began writing again, new songs came in a burst of inspiration.

And much like a ship to shore himself, the artist was instinctively drawn to his own musical roots, employing them in the service of fashioning a deep and diverse 12-track collection that pulls from various styles, genres and eras, but remains unmistakably Richard Thompson. “I liked the idea of having a strong base to work from and reaching out from there,” he says. “And I think of my base as being British traditional music, but there’s also Scottish music, there’s Irish music. There’s jazz and country and classical. As far as I’m concerned, once you establish your base you can reach out anywhere. It’ll still be you ringing through, wherever you decide to go musically.”

As for where he started? Naturally, at the start. “Freeze,” the leadoff track on *Ship To Shore*, is also the first of the new songs Thompson composed. And it’s classic RT, with a bounding rhythm – “a strange cross between Celtic and African,” he says – punctuated

by nimble, curlicue guitar licks and dark (at times, darkly humorous) lyrics, in this case of a man so paralyzed by his life that he can't even bring himself to end it. Hesitating on a ledge, Thompson sings, "A friendly breeze there might push you / Make up your troubled mind for you."

It only gets darker from there. Specifically, to "The Fear Never Leaves You," in which a soldier returned from battle attempts, unsuccessfully, to find respite from the bloody images that clog his mind. The musical backdrop, meanwhile, is smooth and supple, all pulsing toms, warm keys, gently-plucked guitar notes and hushed background vocals – an intentional juxtaposition. "I like the idea of having a seductive surface where the listener gets sucked in by a fairly pleasant melody," Thompson explains. "But then, there are hidden sharks in the water."

To craft *Ship To Shore*, Thompson retreated to Applehead Recording in Woodstock, New York, where he was joined by his longtime band – guitarist Bobby Eichorn, bassist Taras Prodaniuk, and drummer Michael Jerome – along with harmony vocalist Zara Phillips, fiddle player David Mansfield, and Applehead engineer Chris Bittner. The team worked quick – roughly a week to track, and another three or four days to mix – and recordings were mostly live takes, vocals included. "There was a slight feeling of being under the gun, which isn't a bad thing," Thompson says. "We spend a lot of time playing together, so we can knock tracks off pretty quickly."

Even with the compressed schedule, Thompson and the band managed to cover a lot of stylistic ground. There's the rumbling, Motown-style rhythm that propels "Trust," and the straightforward riff-rock of "Turnstile Casanova." The drone-y "The Old Pack Mule," an "old man's song" that takes musical cues from 1600s-era European music, and "Life's a Bloody Show," an ode to "snake-oil salesmen and hucksters" that floats on a glummy, cabaret-like melody that's "almost like a parody of a Noël Coward song, or something from Berlin in the 1920s," Thompson says.

And if you're looking for some of that patented Thompson guitar dazzle? Look pretty much anywhere on *Ship To Shore*. But maybe linger just a bit on "Maybe," a sharp, snappy ditty that sees our protagonist losing his mind over the girl of his dreams... or nightmares. As the song reaches its fervid climax, Thompson's guitar goes as haywire as the poor guy's brain, spitting hot licks, playful note bursts and madcap phrases across the sonic spectrum. "That's one that will be great to play live," Thompson notes, "because the possibilities are quite open. It'll be fun to just be improvising on that every night."

Finally, the album wraps with a sort of red herring: a countrified road-dog number titled "We Roll," which, on first listen, comes across as a farewell of sorts. "We thank you for

all your love down the years,” Thompson intones over a dusty rhythm. “We hope we brought you some joy and some tears.”

“It does have a slightly valedictory feel to it,” the artist admits of the song. “But I’m not intending to hang up my plectrum anytime soon.” To the contrary, Thompson lets slip that, even as he unveils *Ship To Shore*, he already has another album written and “ready to take into the studio.”

Always moving, never standing still. As for what keeps him going? “I’m uncomfortable if I don’t do it,” Thompson reasons. “If I don’t write, if I don’t perform, I get frustrated and I feel like I’m not being the human being I should be.”

He pauses, then continues digging. “Things just drive you, though I don’t always know what they are, exactly. I think ghosts from my past – past traumas, past frustrations, whatever, often drive me creatively.” He laughs. “But I don’t know. It’s hard to say. Perhaps I need to see an analyst!”