

JASPER JONAH JONES

HAPPY
BIRTHDAY
TO ME



LYRICS + LINER NOTES



Happy Birthday to Me

JASPER JONAH JONES

I was saving it for an occasion.
I am the occasion tonight.

CJSP RECORDS | 28 AUGUST 2026

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A birthday present to myself.

No Apology in the Mirror

This album began with a simple refusal: I would not make myself the joke this year.

For a long time, the clown role was useful. It could light a room, lower the temperature, and make other people comfortable. Self-deprecation arrived dressed as charm. If I laughed first, nobody could surprise me. If I made myself smaller, no one else had to decide whether I belonged. The trick worked. That was the problem.

There comes a birthday when the old trick becomes too expensive. You hear yourself offer one more joke at your own expense and realize the bill has always come to you. You stand in front of the mirror and catch yourself preparing an apology - not for anything you have done, but for being there at all. Happy Birthday to Me lives after that moment.

Jasper does not wake up as a different man. He buys the cake. He wears the good shirt. He answers the call at twelve-oh-one without mistaking memory for a promise. He lets a woman laugh where it is funny and listen where it hurts. He recognizes handwriting before he sees a name. He thanks the people who carried him, including the ones who could not stay to see him stand.

Becoming, Continued

The record keeps choosing ordinary acts because becoming rarely announces itself. It tastes like coffee becoming coffee again. It looks like curtains opened, lunch accepted, keys left in a pocket, and an afternoon allowed to pass without being hurried toward the exit. Growth is not a makeover. It is the slow loss of the need to narrate your own unworthiness before someone else can.

The humor remains. The contempt does not. Growing out of the clown role does not mean becoming solemn or pretending the clown never helped. He helped. He survived rooms that felt dangerous, made strangers kind, and kept silence from swallowing the night. He can be thanked. He can also sit down now. He does not have to work every room.

That is why 'I am the occasion tonight' is not arrogance. It is the end of postponement. 'Put my name on the cake' is not a demand for applause. It is an act of recordkeeping. I was here. Spell it correctly. Set me in the middle. Let me take the chair that was open all along.

I made this record as a birthday present to myself. Not because I am finished, fixed, or free of every old reflex. I made it because becoming does not require rejecting every former self, and acceptance does not require a final version. It asks for a quieter courage: to look in the mirror and not say sorry to the person looking back.

The final song says it plainly: not healed, not fixed - a quiet yes to now. That is the birthday wish. Not perfection. Presence. Not a performance of confidence. A willingness to remain where life can reach you. This year the name is on the cake, the good shirt is out of the dark, and the eyes stay open when the match is struck.

This year, the name stays on the cake.

THE RECORD

Ten ways back to the table

01	Put My Name on the Cake	03:03
02	I Wore the Good Shirt Anyway	03:02
03	You Call at Twelve-Oh-One	02:33
04	She Laughed Where It Was Funny	02:59
05	Handwriting I Know	03:03
06	Birthdays Past	02:52
07	The Way I Mended	03:02
08	Letting the Living Back In	02:58
09	And I Stayed Long	03:01
10	Let Life Touch Me	02:56

Put the name in the middle. Let the life come in.

Put My Name on the Cake

The girl behind the bakery glass
held up her paper slip.
"Who's the lucky one?" she asked,
her pencil at her lip.
"Today I am," I told her.
"Jasper. Make it large."
She reached beneath the counter
for a fresh blue icing bag.

PRE-CHORUS

I watched the letters cross the white,
one careful curve at a time.
I'd carried home a hundred cakes.
Not one had carried mine.

CHORUS

Put my name on the cake.
Spell every letter right.
Set it in the middle.
Let me strike the match tonight.
I have stood behind the candles,
singing everybody's name.
I have made it to the table.
Put my name on the cake.

VERSE 2

At eight I set it on the piano
beside the jar of tips.
The drummer clicked his sticks together.
The sax man wet his lips.
The waitress brought a stack of forks.
The bartender found plates.
I didn't wait for anyone
to tell me I could celebrate.

PRE-CHORUS

I laid the matches by the cake
and took the center chair.
It had been open all along.
I'd never sat down there.

CHORUS

Put my name on the cake.
Spell every letter right.
Set it in the middle.
Let me strike the match tonight.
I have stood behind the candles,
singing everybody's name.
I have made it to the table.
Put my name on the cake.

BRIDGE

There were birthdays by the telephone
long after ten o'clock,
birthdays cutting one thin slice
and folding down the box.
Birthdays I kept quiet
so nobody could fail.
Tonight I bought the biggest cake
the bakery would sell.

BREAKDOWN

The drummer asked, "You ready?"
I held the match up high.
I didn't whisper any wish.
I opened both my eyes.

FINAL CHORUS

Put my name on the cake.
Spell every letter right.
Set it in the middle.
Watch me strike the match tonight.
I have stood behind the candles,
singing everybody's name.
Now I've made it to the table,
and I mean to take my place.

OUTRO

The wax ran through the letters.
The whole room found the key.
I cut the first piece for myself.
Here's to another year of me.

I Wore the Good Shirt Anyway

It waited in a garment bag
Behind my winter coat,
Midnight blue with pearl-white buttons,
Still buttoned at the throat.

I bought it for an evening
That never found a date.
Tonight I pulled the paper free
At seven twenty-eight.

PRE-CHORUS

I nearly chose the gray one,
The one that disappears.
Then saw my face above the collar
And thought, Not this year.

CHORUS

I wore the good shirt anyway,
Midnight blue beneath the light.
I was saving it for an occasion.
I am the occasion tonight.

VERSE 2

A woman in the elevator
Said, "That blue looks good on you."
I thanked her like a gentleman.
I knew that much was true.

Outside, the rain had polished
Every parked car in a line.
I walked until the restaurants closed.
The whole evening was mine.

CHORUS

I wore the good shirt anyway,
Midnight blue beneath the light.
I was saving it for an occasion.
I am the occasion tonight.

BRIDGE

I used to call it patience,
Keeping everything like new.
But midnight blue can fade in darkness.
I was starting to fade too.

FINAL CHORUS

I wore the good shirt anyway,
Midnight blue beneath the light.
I was saving it for an occasion.
I am the occasion tonight.

I wore the good shirt anyway.
No invitation, no alibi.
I was saving it for an occasion.
I am the occasion tonight.

OUTRO

Not this year.
I am the occasion tonight.

You Call at Twelve-Oh-One

At midnight, nothing happened.
One minute later, light
Spread your name across the table
In the middle of the night.
I let it ring exactly twice,
The way I always do,
Then answered with the careful voice
I only use for you.

CHORUS

You call at twelve-oh-one,
Never early, never late,
Just enough to say you remembered,
Not enough to change the date.
You ask me what I wished for.
I say, 'Nothing you can bring.'
You call at twelve-oh-one,
Then we talk of other things.

VERSE 2

You said our song came on today
While waiting at a light.
You let the whole thing play this time.
I said, 'That sounds all right.'
Then someone moved behind you.
You said, 'I ought to go.'
I watched the candle shorten.
I said, 'I know. I know.'

CHORUS

You call at twelve-oh-one,
Never early, never late,
Just enough to say you remembered,
Not enough to change the date.
You ask me what I wished for.
I say, 'Nothing you can bring.'
You call at twelve-oh-one,
Then we talk of other things.

BRIDGE

Once I would have held the silence
Till one of us gave in.
Tonight I watched your name go dark
And did not call again.

FINAL CHORUS

You called at twelve-oh-one,
Never early, never late,
Just enough to say you remembered,
Not enough to change the date.
You asked me what I wished for.
I said, 'Nothing you can bring.'
You called at twelve-oh-one,
And we talked of other things.

She Laughed Where It Was Funny

She arrived at seven-thirty,
Rain shining on her sleeve.
She folded up her umbrella
And sat across from me.

The waiter called the wine
'approachable.'
I said, 'That's more than me.'
She laughed and raised her water glass.
'We'll have to wait and see.'

CHORUS

She laughed where it was funny.
She listened where it hurt.
She never made me smaller
To make the evening work.

She saw me in the silence
When the clever words were through.
She laughed where it was funny
And liked the whole of me too.

VERSE 2

By coffee, I had told her
About my name in blue,
The bakery, the single flame,
The first slice cutting through.

She didn't call it lonely
Or tilt her head that way.
She asked me if I saved a slice.
I said, 'It's not far away.'

CHORUS

She laughed where it was funny.
She listened where it hurt.
She never made me smaller
To make the evening work.

She saw me in the silence
When the clever words were through.
She laughed where it was funny
And liked the whole of me too.

BRIDGE

When I ran out of stories,
She didn't check the time.
She turned her coffee cup around
And rested her hand near mine.

FINAL CHORUS

She laughed where it was funny.
She listened where it hurt.
She never made me smaller
To make the evening work.

She saw me in the silence
When the clever words were through.
She laughed where it was funny
And liked the whole of me too.

Handwriting I Know

At ten-fifteen, the mail slot
Sent four envelopes to the floor:
One cream, one blue, one corner bent,
One taped along the fold.
Before I turned them over,
Before I broke the seals,
I knew each one before the name
By how the letters leaned.

CHORUS

Handwriting I know—
The hurried and the slow.
One letter climbs the margin;
One keeps a careful row.
Handwriting I know,
Curved gently round my name.
Somebody held this envelope
And thought of me that day.

VERSE 2

The block print from my oldest friend
Said, “Still alive, I see.”
The looping hand filled both sides,
Then underlined “Call me.”
One card contained no wisdom,
Just a joke from years ago.
I laughed before I finished it—
That handwriting I know.

CHORUS

Handwriting I know—
The hurried and the slow.
One letter climbs the margin;
One keeps a careful row.
Handwriting I know,
Curved gently round my name.
Somebody held this envelope
And thought of me that day.

BRIDGE

I stood them by the cake box,
Four colors in a row.
My name was all around the room
In handwriting I know.

FINAL CHORUS

Handwriting I know—
The hurried and the slow.
One letter climbs the margin;
One keeps a careful row.
Handwriting I know,
Curved gently round my name.
Somebody held this envelope
And thought of me that day.

OUTRO

My name was all around the room
In handwriting I know.

Birthdays Past

I went looking for the matches
In the drawer beside the stove,
And found a stack of pictures
From twenty years ago.
Paper hats and crooked candles,
Blue frosting on my face—
Half the faces now are ghosts,
But no one is erased.

CHORUS

Here's to birthdays past—
To the hands that struck the match,
To the voices singing off-key,
To the arms that held me fast.
Some are gone, some far away,
Some I lost along the way,
But I wouldn't light this candle
Without the light they gave.
Here's to birthdays past.

VERSE 2

The woman with the silver hair
Who made the lopsided cakes,
The friend who crossed three counties
When my courage nearly gave,
The one who paid my light bill
And called it no big thing,
The one who sat beside me
Till I wanted one more spring.

CHORUS

Here's to birthdays past—
To the hands that struck the match,
To the voices singing off-key,
To the arms that held me fast.
Some are gone, some far away,
Some I lost along the way,
But I wouldn't light this candle
Without the light they gave.
Here's to birthdays past.

BRIDGE

So I raise this kitchen tumbler—
Nothing crystal, nothing grand—
To everyone who carried me
And couldn't stay to see me stand.
If the dead can hear the living,
Let them hear me say it plain:
I am here because you loved me,
And your love was not in vain.

FINAL CHORUS

Here's to birthdays past—
To the hands that struck the match,
To the voices singing off-key,
To the arms that held me fast.
Some are gone, some far away,
Some I lost along the way,
But I wouldn't light this candle
Without the light they gave.
Here's to birthdays past.

OUTRO

I wouldn't light this candle
Without the light they gave.
Here's to birthdays past.

The Way I Mended

I paid the rent and water bill,
Took trash out every week,
Said “Morning” to the neighbors
When they stopped to speak.
I ate because the clock said six,
Then locked the kitchen door.
My heart kept time, but nothing more—
It had forgotten what for.

CHORUS

But I’m still here—
Not the man I was before.
I quit waiting for his footsteps
On the other side of the door.
I did not come back all at once,
Or in the shape I’d been.
I learned to live with the way I mended
And the man it made of me.

VERSE 2

Then one morning coffee tasted
Like coffee once again.
I laughed before I noticed
At a joke from an old friend.
I bought two seats for September
With half the spring to go.
My heart was making plans again
Before it let me know.

CHORUS

But I’m still here—
Not the man I was before.
I quit waiting for his footsteps
On the other side of the door.
I did not come back all at once,
Or in the shape I’d been.
I learned to live with the way I mended
And the man it made of me.

BRIDGE

I used to measure every good day
By the life I had before,
As if healing meant returning,
As if I could find that door.
Now I measure by the wanting—
Who I call and where I go,
By the plans I make for autumn
And the people I let close.

FINAL CHORUS

I’m still here—
Not the man I was before.
I don’t wait to hear his footsteps
On the other side of the door.
I did not come back all at once,
Or in the shape I’d been.
I learned to live with the way I mended
And the man it made of me.

OUTRO

My heart was making plans again
Before it let me know.

Letting the Living Back In

VERSE 1

I pulled the curtains open
At a quarter after eight.
Sunlight crossed the carpet
In a long uneven shape.
A school bus stopped at the corner;
The neighbor rolled his bins.
My phone said, "Lunch at twelve?"
I wrote back, "Where and when?"

CHORUS

I'm letting the living back in—
The voices and the light,
The lunch I didn't cancel,
The call I take at night.
Nothing grand and nothing finished,
No promise where it ends.
Just morning light across the room—
I'm letting the living back in.

VERSE 2

At noon I met an old friend
At the diner near the tracks.
He stole three fries from my plate
Like no time had passed.
He talked about his daughter;
I complained about the rain.
We stayed until the waitress
Warmed our coffee cups again.

CHORUS

I'm letting the living back in—
The voices and the light,
The lunch I didn't cancel,
The call I take at night.
Nothing grand and nothing finished,
No promise where it ends.
Just coffee getting cold between us—
I'm letting the living back in.

BRIDGE

I used to think that living
Would announce itself somehow—
A sudden rush of feeling,
A clear and certain vow.
But it came in through the small things:
An extra cup, an hour to spend,
A name lighting up my telephone
I wanted to answer then.

FINAL CHORUS

I'm letting the living back in—
The voices and the light,
The lunch I didn't cancel,
The call I take at night.
Nothing grand and nothing finished,
No promise where it ends.
Just evening light across the table—
I'm letting the living back in.

OUTRO

The voices and the light—
I'm letting the living back in.

And I Stayed Long

I stopped in for a haircut
At the shop beside the bank.
The bell above the doorway
Rang once behind my back.
The barber said, "The usual?"
I said, "Don't take too much."
The home team loaded the bases;
Every clipper stopped.

CHORUS

And I stayed long—
Through one haircut after mine,
Through the tying run at second,
Through the bottom of the ninth.
No one asked why I was staying.
The barber swept the floor.
An ordinary afternoon
Was settling in my bones.
And I stayed long.

VERSE 2

My collar had been brushed clean;
I paid and took my change.
My hand was on the doorknob
When somebody said my name.
"You think they'll pull it out?"
"Not if he leaves him in."
They shifted on the bench seat.
I sat back down again.

CHORUS

And I stayed long—
Through one haircut after mine,
Through the tying run at second,
Through the bottom of the ninth.
No one asked why I was staying.
The barber swept the floor.
An ordinary afternoon
Was settling in my bones.
And I stayed long.

BRIDGE

I used to start my leaving
Before I reached the door—
Keys already in my fingers,
Mind halfway down the block.
But that day my shoulders settled;
My keys stayed in my pocket.
An hour passed without my help,
And I forgot to watch it.

FINAL CHORUS

So I stayed long—
Through one haircut after mine,
Through the tying run at second,
Through the bottom of the ninth.
No one asked why I was staying.
The barber swept the floor.
An ordinary afternoon
Was settling in my bones.
And I stayed long.

OUTRO

An ordinary afternoon
Was settling in my bones.

Let Life Touch Me

From here.
Not healed. Not fixed.
A quiet yes to now.
Let life touch me.

VERSE 1

Cold floor beneath my feet.
Cold morning on my skin.
My hands stay open at my sides.
I do not draw them in.
No smile to arrange.
No answer rehearsed.
I let the day touch what it finds.
My answer now is yes.

HOOK

From here.
Not healed. Not fixed.
A quiet yes to now.
Let life touch me.

VERSE 2

The ache is where it is.
The fear has not grown small.
I feel them both, and neither one
Can make me leave at all.
I do not call it courage.
I do not call it peace.
I stay where life can touch me.
I do not pull away.

FINAL HOOK

From here.
Not healed. Not fixed.
A quiet yes to now.
Let life touch me.

The names behind the names

01	Put My Name on the Cake	QT6682605717 / 03:03
02	I Wore the Good Shirt Anyway	QT6682605718 / 03:02
03	You Call at Twelve-Oh-One	QT6682605719 / 02:33
04	She Laughed Where It Was Funny	QT6682605720 / 02:59
05	Handwriting I Know	QT6682605721 / 03:03
06	Birthdays Past	QT6682605722 / 02:52
07	The Way I Mended	QT6682605723 / 03:02
08	Letting the Living Back In	QT6682605724 / 02:58
09	And I Stayed Long	QT6682605725 / 03:01
10	Let Life Touch Me	QT6682605726 / 02:56

RELEASE

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**For the person in the mirror
who no longer has to apologize
for taking up the frame.**