

Chuck Brodsky's *Color Came One Day*

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In olden times minstrels would traverse the countryside, in the process musically disseminating news of current (or at least, recent) events. In these modern times the closest equivalent to these ancient troubadours is the contemporary Folk singer/songwriter. Across a dozen cuts, on *Color Came One Day*, **Chuck Brodsky** takes the listener upon an informative journey to the poisoned air currents near his Asheville home; a graveyard in Canso, Nova Scotia; the Quiet Valley Ranch in Kerrville, Texas (parts of this review were written, early one morning, in that spiritual haven); a village pub somewhere in Ireland, and more. Much more.

Chuck and his guitar began making an annual performing pilgrimage to the Emerald Isle a handful of years back. The opening cut, "The 9:30 Pint," is set in the land of the jet black liquid nectar and the narrator is a charming (disarming even), open-minded barkeep in one of that nation's countless drinking holes - "*It's not so a big town and I know all of the locals.*" Across eight verses, Chuck captures snapshots of the bar's early morning drinkers, the 21st Century reality of cutthroat competition from nearby hostelries, and more. Hell, he even turns up in his own lyric, "*I can tell you're not a local - are you from across the sea?*"

A few days after appearing at the 1983 Kerrville Folk Festival, on his way home one of Nova Scotia's finest, [Stan Rogers](#), perished in a plane fire. In the penultimate verse of "The Ballad Of Stan Rogers & Leo Kennedy," Brodsky refers to his own feeling of personal fulfilment in the early morning light, following an all-night Kerrville campfire song circle. For more than a decade Brodsky has camped some forty feet from where Rogers sang his final songs on this Earth. That said, the events in Chuck's song mainly occur in Canso, Nova Scotia, where annually they hold the Stan Rogers Folk Festival. In the local Lions Hall, aka the backstage area, Chuck finds a portrait of the late Leo Kennedy, a travelling salesman and well-known local raconteur. Having enquired the directions, Brodsky goes to visit Leo's grave. After paying his respects, and about to leave - a ghostly voice says, "*Stay for another song, son*" - as the sound of a Stan Rogers tune drifts up the hill from the festival site.

A paper processing plant "Seven Miles Upwind" of Chuck's Asheville home discharges toxic waste with impunity, and the lyric is a chilling indictment of the use and abuse of corporate power. As for the "G-ddamned Blessed Road," it is quite simply not 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 or 6, but over 7 minutes of musical perfection. Yes, it's a road song, but it isn't one of those "Oh woe is me" diatribes. Far from it, it's a testament to the joys and heartaches as well as the riches that come with the journey. The first word in the song title "Miracle In The Hills" may be singular, but in truth Dr. Mary Martin Sloop and her husband,

Dr. Eustace, performed numerous miracles - they start a public school, bring electricity to the area, and so on - in a severely deprived area near the western North Carolina town of Crossnore, circa the opening decades of the twentieth century. Chuck took his song title from the title of Dr. Mary's autobiography. "Trees Falling" is a tale of another deal done by the boys in the back room, as one more out of town supermarket rises and the Main Street stores in another American town subsequently and quickly

perish. Elsewhere, Brodsky's lyric points the finger at gated communities - "*A developer's dream*" - and, for instance, the road that now leads to a waterfall, where they now charge entrance admission in order to view it.

Although Brodsky has, probably deliberately, retained a universality about the lyric to "Claire & Johnny," it's a fact that the touching love story that unfolds therein was told to him in an Irish bar. When the one that you are closest to - "*Claire, she loves Johnny, And Johnny, he loves Claire,*" - begins to act strangely and is, in fact, mentally ill, the choices are few, yet hard. When push come to shove, Johnny chooses to have Claire committed to a care home. The song ends perfectly with Johnny on one of his regular visits to his beloved spouse - "*She tells him that she hates him, He strokes her lovely hair, Of all the places we could stop for now...*" By way of an antidote to the powerful emotion woven into the fabric of the foregoing cut, "The Room Over The Bar" is a location that should be thoroughly familiar to all travelling musicians. Suffice to say, that, as Brodsky humorously enumerates in exhaustive detail everything that is wrong with *the room*, you'll find yourself doubled with laughter.

"Forest Hills Sub" - "*it's a wholesome kind of place*" - is a song about day-to-day life, inclusive of neighbours with odd tastes, displays of racial bigotry and more. Chuck delivers a perfect snapshot of this nationwide location, circa 2004, with "*They all have their opinions - but none of them have clues, There's a patriotic silence - there are no dissenting views.*" Having already included a humorous self-deprecating reference elsewhere on this album, in the closing verse Chuck writes, "*So let the credits roll - and you can use my song, My guess is that for Hollywood - it's a few seconds too long.*" Brodsky is, once again, poking fun at himself. A couple of verses of Chuck's song "Radio" played over the closing credits of the 2003 high school football movie of the same name (while the instrumental segments on the original "Radio" track were removed from the movie soundtrack recording!).

"The Goat Man" features the previously unsung and wily (and somewhat eccentric) 20th Century road warrior, Ches McCartney, while "Dangerous Times" focuses upon 21st Century America and a government who has lost sight of individual freedom in their hell-bent haste to guarantee national security. "Al's Ashes & Me" opens at the front gate of the Quiet Valley Ranch. Al is the late [Al Grierson](#), a fine human being who, among many things in a rich and diverse life, was a songwriter - *nay*, a poet. Al lost his life in a Texas flash flood in late 2001. In this song, and closing cut, Chuck and his phial of Al's ashes take a road trip.

Let's put it this way - if I haven't said it already, screening from one end to the other, *Color Came One Day* is one hell of a movie featuring a number of previously unsung American heroes, while elsewhere it focuses upon this life, the struggles we endure, the defeats we accept, as well as the victories that occur once in a blue moon. In the scheme of things, songwriters come and go, and after a handful of album releases, in terms of saying something new, they mostly plateau. Brodsky is a virtual exception to the latter contention. Darn if the kid who was raised in Philly doesn't keep on getting better and better, with each succeeding creation. As a reviewer for decades, Brodsky's ever burgeoning catalogue of songs (1991 - to date) has been a pleasingly wonderful reviewing experience, whether it involved shedding a tear (there have been a few), releasing a deep belly laugh (same there), or learning a lesson (there have been many).

It certainly isn't due to the lack of superb material that Brodsky has yet to regularly wow multitudinous audiences in cavernous concert halls, because this guy skillfully pens knockout songs with frightening regularity. It's merely down to that age-old conundrum that for some success arrives on a silver platter, while for others life proves to be a rather hard row to hoe. Chuck's message is simple, honest, and truly true, and his observations deserve your undivided attention. His name, once again, is Chuck Brodsky. He deserves your ear. Listen to him today, tomorrow, and every day after that...as I mentioned earlier, you'll come away "*Rich from the journey.*"

Allow me to deliver one final compliment - here's to the rather splendid, Celtic-flavoured production of this masterful Brodsky song collection by, one of Nova Scotia's finest musicians, [J. P. Cormier](#). I humbly assign this recording a *FolkWax* rating "10" out of "10," only because I can't award an "11."

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