

## Lyrics to Blow You Away

Review

**Folkwax**

Following a string of six studio albums Chuck Brodsky returns with a live collection thereby replicating the format of his 1991 cassette-only, solo debut, *Live From Spam City*. Recorded, in this instance, at venues in Dublin, Ireland, and Sautee, Georgia, as well as his adopted home of Asheville, North Carolina, *Two Sets* is a double-disc featuring twenty-five Brodsky originals, including a pair of tunes new to his oeuvre.

A consummate storyteller - my favourite form of song lyric - Brodsky's cleverly-worded vignettes can span the cradle to the grave or simply focus on one of life's minor episodes. The Disc 1 opener, "He Came To Our Town," adopts the latter approach wherein Brodsky cleverly neither identifies the party colour nor the incumbent's name, but astutely grasps the positive (and mainly negative) aspects of a "visit" by a campaigning politician - "Things went back to normal, but it took two or three days/The homeless returned to livin' outside/And the flowers that got planted all wilted and died." Annually, come late May, you'll more than likely find Brodsky's tent pitched on Kerrwood Quiet Valley Ranch campgrounds and "Bill & Annie" is a bittersweet tale of love found at the wrong time as related (to Brodsky) by a Texas Hill Country peach vender.

Anyone familiar with Brodsky's back catalogue will know that he is an avid baseball fan and a lifelong supporter of the Philadelphia Phillies. "Doc Ellis No No," which appeared on *The Baseball Ballads* [2002], is a real trip (LSD, that is), while Brodsky's 1998 American football-themed "Radio" appeared on the soundtrack of the 2003 movie of the same name. "A Toast To The Women In The Holler" recounts how, with music, we pass down a living legacy to the next generation and in his spoken introduction to "Dangerous Times" (from *Color Came One Day* [2004]) Brodsky remembers the instance where a set of guitar strings were removed from his guitar case during a post 9/11 airport security search and then handed to a stewardess on the plane (arriving at his destination Brodsky was handed his strings). In an aside to the stewardess, Brodsky astutely encapsulated this manifest form of hysteria with the insight "If you think those are dangerous, you ought to hear the songs."

Spanning the invasion of an unnamed European country during World War II through to an unspecified post-conflict date - probably decades later - in the new number "Lili's Braids" the sole survivor of a Jewish family returns to his birthplace to reclaim locks of his sister's hair (given to sympathetic neighbours for safekeeping, her hair had been cut prior to her being taken away by the Germans). While the latter is a fiction possessed of truth and tragedy, "Old Song Handed Down" was inspired by Brodsky's discovery that there was a violin player in his Russian ancestral line.

Lessons for life are learned by a father and son in "The Point" and from the same collection (*Tulips For Lunch* [2006]) Brodsky prefaces "The Man Who Blew Kisses" with the recollection of how he observed, from the stage of the Stan Rogers Festival in Canso, Nova Scotia, this mentally impaired but very animated adult. For a number of years now Brodsky has annually toured Ireland and in a County Leitrim bar he discovered the tradition of "The 9:30 Pint." The first disc closes with the amusing new tune

"Armitage Shanks," a tribute to the porcelain receptacle manufacturer (Armitage Shanks is a British manufacturer of bathroom fixtures and plumbing supplies) and the product in which we daily drain our liquid intake.

Disc 2 also offers a wide-ranging selection of tunes from Brodsky's back catalogue and opens with "Take It Out Back," a tongue-in-cheek comment on the disposal of trash. Brodsky follows with "The Come Heres And The Been Heres," an amusing reflection upon being new to the hood. He then moves on with "Trees Falling," a positive and negative take on land development versus the environment. Elsewhere Brodsky recalls his days as a fruit picker in Northern California ("La Migra Viene") and childhood baseball hero Richie Allen ("Letters In The Dirt"), parody's compensation culture ("Talk To My Lawyer"), and includes the delightful waltz-paced unexpected love story "Two Left Feet." While introducing "We Are Each Other's Angels" - penned in 1981 and finally recorded nearly a decade and a half later - he informs the audience that it's his oldest composition as well as his mom's favourite. Brodsky's reflections on intolerance ("Our Gods") and corrupt politicians ("The Boys In The Back Room"), as well as the self-explanatory "On Christmas I Got Nothing," and "The Goodbye Kid" also appear on Two Sets. Prior to this release Brodsky had cut "Blow 'Em Away," his irony-filled take on American gun culture, on three occasions beginning with the aforementioned Live From Spam City.

Folks, his name is Chuck Brodsky and if you pay close attention his lyrics will also blow you away... Intimately familiar with the full story behind these highly literate songs, many continue to induce severe bouts of the chills - goose bumps, raised arm hairs, eye moisture, and more - the latter surely ongoing testimony that these songs will survive generations. Seasoned Brodsky followers will be charmed by the between-songs introductions, live interpretations, and two new numbers. If you're not familiar with Brodsky's back catalogue, Two Sets is a perfect primer...hooked, you will purchase the predecessors.

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