



Bob Franke “**The Other Evening In Chicago**” Waterbug Records

There’s intentional humour in the title of this live recording. Back in 1983 the Great Divide label released a Bob Franke live album titled “**One Evening In Chicago**,” and on both occasions Rich Warren, long-time host of WFMT Chicago’s “Midnight Special,” has been responsible for making the recording. Two decades ago Warren used a portable tape deck, but there’s far more sophisticated gizmos around these days.

Following a short introduction by Warren, Franke opens his performance with “Kitchen Boy” a new addition to his already extensive catalogue. It relates the story of a poor boy, jack of all trades in the Grand Hotel, who falls head over heels for a rich man’s daughter – “*with the damnest yellow hair.*” When her father learns of their shared and secret passion, with a price now on his head, the kitchen boy has to make his getaway alone. Nowadays, using an assumed name, the one time kitchen boy makes his living playing fiddle – and here’s the irony – he stole the rich man’s fiddle. Literally from the outset of the inspirational “Alleluia, The Great Storm Is Over” the voices of the WMFT “Folkstage” audience add their weight to Franke’s. The latter is one of four Franke originals in this collection that previously appeared on “**One Evening In Chicago**,” the other songs being “Hard Love” [a pulls-no-punches recollection of Bob’s upbringing], “My Favourite Women” and “Thanksgiving Eve.” As the applause that follows “Great Storm” dies, Bob proffers an appreciative “*Well thank you so much*” to his backing singers.

By way of summation, “**The Other Evening In Chicago**” is a mix of already familiar Franke creations and a handful of compositions never previously captured on a recording. Traditional elements are present in every song that Franke has penned – that’s what I consistently hear anyway. That said he’s a scribe who mostly captures, in verse, facets of modern life – for instance, you wouldn’t find Warren Zevon name-checked in the lyric of a Child Ballad. The marriage of traditional and contemporary influences, places Bob in a somewhat unique position in the folk music world.

Having already offered some insight into “Kitchen Boy,” the other new songs include the amusing “My Lover’s T-Shirts” a comment on *her laundry* that hangs “*All over my house, Which is also her house*” following which Bob quantifies the magnitude of the problem with “*They are many, She’s trying to keep them down to ninety.*” “Collateral Damage” recalls the needless and premature death of musician Freyda Epstein at the hands of a man on the run. The former Trapezoid vocalist, solo artist and teacher, was killed May 17th 2003 following a head-on collision, near Madison, Virginia, when the other driver [deliberately] crossed the central reservation. The other driver, who also died, had just stabbed his girlfriend. Pierce Pettis included a dedication to Freyda in the liner booklet to his 2004 Compass release “**Great Big World**,” while Bob’s lyric recalls her many contributions to the world of music, as well as the tragic chain of events that led to her passing. The lyric to “Source,” which immediately follows, gives expression to spiritual issues, and could be interpreted as a eulogy for Freyda. If you possess a passing knowledge of Mexican traditions then you will undoubtedly have heard of the “Day Of The Dead.” Franke’s lyric was inspired by his sister’s reflection, she’s a therapist, that as you pass the age of forty you must, to the best of your ability, enjoy every moment of each God given day. Part and parcel of reaching that age is the reality that the time for you, as well as family members and friends, to go to meet your/their maker has drawn closer.

Having mentioned that four tunes previously appeared on “**One Evening In Chicago**,” it’s worth noting that one of them, “Thanksgiving Eve,” includes an additional verse, which, as Bob explains during his introduction, entered his consciousness following the passing of his brother-in-law in 1990. Having already highlighted Franke, the humorist, the bluesy “Cattfish” provides further evidence of that innate trait, while “Acid Polka” finds Bob, melodically, donning his rock’n’roll shoes to recall a mythical [and psychedelic] Polish Polka Night circa 1967. “William The Streak” - “*he got bored by the rabbit and so he*

got fired" - recalls an aged greyhound that spends his final days chasing groundhogs and woodchucks on a farm. The unexpected benefit being that the farmer enjoys increased crop yield. Franke penned "Love Bravely, Elizabeth" as heartfelt guidance to his daughter in affairs of the heart, and he closes this set of seventeen songs [and ten song intros] with the upbeat "Sleeping Hearts" and encores with "A Still Small Voice." The latter contains yet another inspirational and spiritual Franke lyric.

In concert there's an unhurried grace about Bob Franke's delivery, with voice and acoustic guitar. Sure he tells stories in song, but without resorting to one iota of preaching those stories speaks volumes about his Christian faith, and the way we should [all] conduct our lives.

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 09/05.