



Lucy Kaplansky “**The Tide**” Red House Records

[or as a feature **A Reflection On The Enhanced Version Of Lucy Kaplansky’s Debut Recording – It’s “The Tide” Too**]

Eleven years after Kaplansky’s, Shawn Colvin produced, debut solo recording first appeared Red House Records has now released an enhanced version. For openers “**The Tide**” is now an HDCD pressing, two tracks have been added - albeit that they were produced by Anton Sanko who would, two years later, oversee the recording of Lucy’s sophomore release “**Flesh And Bone**,” and the artwork has been revised. Let’s focus on the latter for a moment. Photographs from the Irene Young session have once again been used, and focusing on Lucy’s face and hands – she’s holding the neck of her guitar - the picture that was located in the rear tray [of the original release] now takes pride of place on the front cover of the liner booklet. In terms of the enhancement if there is a price to pay, and a sacrifice made, then it’s that the song lyrics no longer appear in the booklet.

The Kaplansky/Litvin song [recording produced by Anton Sanko] of the same name apart, it’s worth taking a moment to reflect on the appropriateness of the title “**The Tide**.” By the early nineties, qualified as a psychologist and already practicing, Dr. Kaplansky concluded that music was still a powerful force in her life. Raised in Chicago, Lucy arrived in NYC in 1978 in the company of Elliott Simon. Intent on pursuing a career in music they worked as a duo for a time and, performing three songs, appeared as such on the Greenwich Village songwriter compilation “**Cornelia Street Café Songwriters Exchange**” [1980]. Soon afterwards Lucy became a solo performer, and a contributor to the Fast Folk recordings [+], befriending Shawn Colvin during this period they also worked as a duo, and the pair most certainly became the harmony vocalists of choice for the city’s folk community, but by the late eighties Lucy had turned her back on performing music. In interview I’ve asked Lucy the date of the Colvin led recording sessions, but have never received a precise answer. What I’m probably suggesting is that they may have taken place in the late eighties during, or even prior to, her college studies.

Whatever, as a title “**The Tide**” works on a couple of levels. Firstly, with this release, Kaplansky was clearly indicating a turning of the tide and a willingness to get back into “the game” and make some music. In my first [1996] interview with Lucy she referred to making music as “*my burning desire*.” A decade plus on, considering the content of her quartet of subsequent Red House releases, it also makes sense in a second regard, in that this recording contains a trio of song titles bearing her name. The writing credit of one song, “The Tide,” which appropriately opens the album, also bears the name of her husband, Richard Litvin. According to Lucy “*He’s a filmmaker and a writer*,” and Rick Litvin is also a NYU lecturer/departments head. Lucy’s other songs “Somebody’s Home” and “You Just Need A Home,” date, respectively, from 1985 and 1982. Returning to my 1996 interview, Lucy revealed “*I had written four songs by about 1985. Two of them ended up on the record*.” “The Tide,” written circa 1994, as the passage of time has proved, was the tip of a veritable “*tidal wave*” of ever more impressive song lyrics that were subsequently credited to the Litvin/Kaplansky partnership.

So what of the album’s other contents? Essentially they’re cover songs that mostly focus on the work of singer/songwriters in the areas of folk and country music, with a nod, initially, toward pop in the form of Sting’s rare of knots “Secret Journey” and, once again on this enhanced disc, in the form of the addition of Lennon & McCartney’s “**Help**” era medium-paced ballad “I’ve Just Seen A Face.” What’s really on display here is Lucy’s voice, aided by some of her own and Shawn’s “famous” backing vocals. Listen to the Tom Russell and Greg Trooper country-rock tempo collaboration “The Heart” [+] for a prime example of the latter. When I interviewed Greg Trooper during his UK tour of April 1999, I enquired about the

chronology of recording his “**Everywhere**” [1992] and “**Noises In The Hallway**” [1996] albums. His reply ran as follows, ““**Noises**” was recorded first, except that we re-did “We Won’t Dance” and I put a couple of new songs that I wrote on there. “**Everywhere**” was recorded second, but released first.” Greg did not elucidate the exact date of recording “**Noises**.”

Moving on.....displaying a penchant for Richard Thompson’s par for the course “doom and gloom” song content, the narrator contemplates death in “When I Get To The Border.” Bill Morrissey’s “Texas Blues” is a tale of unrequited love, while “My Name Joe” [*] David Massengill’s tale of actions and consequences, features Joe an Asian illegal immigrant and kitchen worker [who always “boozes” ten hours into each fourteen hour shift]. He runs amok in the restaurant kitchen after one of his pictures is defaced, but David’s sides aching with laughter inducing lyric is leavened with pathos. Having picked up a hatchet Joe first “*tenderised the wall*” and turning his attention elsewhere the “*Time clock wasn’t punching anymore.*” When the maitre d’ calls immigration, Joe makes a rapid getaway and, later, on a distant beach muses about his future. A stranger lost in a strange land. At this juncture, here’s my summation.....“The Tide” plus the Russell/Trooper and Massengill compositions are credited in the liner as “published” 1994 or 1992, while the remaining songs bear a publishing date that spans the period 1965 – 1986.

Also a contributor to Fast Folk recordings “**The Tide**” features a couple of Robin Batteau compositions. Batteau was prone to turn up during Lucy & Shawn duo gigs at New York’s The Cottonwood Café and join them onstage. First up, and set in France, there’s the Arthurian “Guinevere” while the later, “The Eyes Of The Beholder,” sung in the male voice – it opens “*I was your knight in shining armour,*” features references to chivalry and love and is a work of aching beauty. Actor George Gerdes, now L.A. based, another contributor to the Fast Folk catalogue of recordings, co-wrote the country sounding “Delivery Truck” with Mark Johnson. Gerdes eventually included the song on his amusingly titled album “**San Andreas Gestalt.**”

The second bonus track is Jesse Winchester’s blues tinged “Everybody Knows But Me” which first appeared on the latter’s album “**Let The Rough Side Drag**” [1976]. The storyline hinges on the “almost instantaneous” dissemination of third party tittle-tattle that began, after the narrator’s current girl told “*Bobby’s girl Betty.*” The foregoing leads the narrator, as the chorus relates, to question, “*How I am your personal private fool.*” Kaplansky’s country sounding “Somebody’s Home” tale of a relationship filled with “*fire and rain,*” is really an allusion to “*sadness and passion.*” In the second half of the song lyric, “*passion*” adopts the form of an all-consuming house fire. Does history repeats itself? Colvin’s 1996 commercial breakthrough song “Sunny Came Home” [#] featured a house fire, albeit one started as a means of wreaking vengeance. The narrator in the lyric to “You Just Need A Home,” Lucy’s other contribution, addresses a [fellow] performer with the offer, “*Come away with me tonight, I can make it all right,*” while she reflects that what the performer truly craves is the “*fire*” of adulation experienced while on a stage. The presence of a pennywhistle gives the song an, at times, Irish feel. Circa late 1980 Cliff Eberhardt introduced Lucy to Shawn, so I guess the inclusion of one of his compositions is no great surprise. A sad lullaby/ballad “Goodnight,” which closed the original album, references unrequited love and the [resulting] inability to sleep during the hours of darkness.

So there you have it, a few historical insights, plus a flavour of the music featured “*in the grooves*” of “**The Tide.**” The following is not a question.....who would have predicted the plethora of melodic and lyrical Kaplansky/Litvin delights that would wash over her fans in the wake of “**The Tide.**” Let’s hope that the next episode from Lucy and Rickie isn’t too far down the line.....

Note.

[+] – Credited on “**The Tide**” liner as a 1994 composition, Russell’s version of “The Heart” finally surfaced on the official bootleg compilation “**Museum Of Memories 1972 - 2002**” [2002], although the recording date of “The Heart” is given as 1990. The song could easily have been composed some time earlier. By the way, Colvin sang on Russell’s debut solo album “**Heart On A Sleeve**” [1984]. The Fast Folk catalogue of recordings is now lodged with The Smithsonian Institution, is administered by Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, and a detailed discography can be seen at <http://www.folkways.si.edu/search/SearchResults.aspx?BrowseBy=label&Param=Fast%20Folk%20Musical%20Magazine>

[*] – “My Name Joe” is credited on “**The Tide**” liner as a 1992 composition, the year that Flying Fish issued David’s official solo debut “**Coming Up For Air.**” However, David’s 1986 cassette only release

“The Great American Bootleg Tape” includes a “Fast Folk Bottom Line outtake” version dating from the same year. The song could easily have been composed some time earlier. As part of the Fast Folk family, Colvin and Kaplansky would have been well familiar with this song.

[#] – Colvin’s “Sunny Come Home” picked up the 1998 Grammys for Record Of The Year and Song Of The Year, and the song was also nominated for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance.

Folkwax Score 8 out of 10

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[1555 words]