



Steve Goodman “**Live At The Earl Of Old Town**” Red Pajamas Records

Steve Goodman was twenty-three years of age when Buddah Records issued his self-titled debut album back in 1971. Thirteen years later Steve passed, but not before he had established a formidable reputation as a songwriter, in the process recording nine solo albums of original material [plus “**Artistic Hair**,” a live recording]. I don’t believe that his catalogue would have remained in print if it wasn’t for the inspired vision that Steve and his management team of Al Bunetta and Dan Einstein had, in establishing Red Pajamas Records, a couple of years prior to his death. In the immediate years following his passing, Goodman scored a couple of Grammy Awards – in 1984 Willie Nelson covered “City Of New Orleans” and it scored Best Country Song, while “**Unfinished Business**” won the Best Contemporary Folk Recording title in 1987. The previous year “**Tribute To Steve Goodman**,” a various artist’s compilation, was the winner of the new Grammy category, Best Contemporary Folk Recording.

As I write this review it’s a month shy of twenty-two years since Steve Goodman joined folk music’s heavenly chorus. Six years earlier, on August 14th 1978 to be exact, “**Live At The Earl Of Old Town**” was recorded at Earl Pionke’s now defunct Wells Street, Chicago venue. Thankfully the between song chat has been left intact, and Steve is accompanied during all/part of this benefit concert by David Amram [flute], Hugh McDonald [bass], Corky Siegel [harmonica] and Jethro Burns [mandolin] of Homer & Jethro fame. “**Live At The Earl Of Old Town**” should not be confused with the first recording that Goodman performed on, namely, “**Gathering At The Earl Of Old Town**” [1970]. The latter was a compilation disc that also contained contributions from Jim Post, Ed and Fred Holstein and others.

Following Earl Pionke’s[?] introduction, on this collection Goodman performs seventeen songs – a rhythmically varied mix of covers and originals. We’ve enjoyed a few ‘live’ Goodman CD/DVD recordings since late 1984, although thankfully we haven’t been subjected to the ill-considered deluge of repetitious ‘same song’ live recordings that followed Townes Van Zandt’s sad demise. Of the aforementioned seventeen, half a dozen tunes – only one is a Steve original – appear for the first time on an official Goodman release. At the time this concert took place, Steve was in the process of recording “**High And Outside**,” his sixth album.

Humour was a powerful element in Steve’s ‘live shtick’ and he launches the show with a ‘I’m taking no prisoners tonight’ rendition of the ‘seafaring ballad inspired’ “Lincoln Park Pirates.” Penned in ‘praise’ of unscrupulous local tow truck drivers, it first appeared on his sophomore release “**Somebody’s Else’s Troubles**.” Harry Woods’ “Red Red Robin” finally appeared on the posthumous “**Artistic Hair**” [1983] as did “Three-Legged Man” Shel Silverstein’s wickedly humorous tale of Peg Leg Johnson’s wife and her lover [the lover is the song’s narrator]. Having stolen Peg Leg’s artificial limb, the ‘on the lam’ narrator offers gems such as “*I’m a three legged man with a two legged woman, Being chased around the country by a one legged fool,*” “*Every time I turn around, he is just one foot behind*” and “*I know he’s getting tired and wet and sick, But in spite of all his trouble he can’t kick.*” Switching styles to gospel on Albert E. Brumley’s “I’ll Fly Away” Steve is accompanied Chicago harmonica ace, Corky Siegel [The Siegel-Schwall Band]. During 1975 walked to the bottom of a rather deep hole in Northern Arizona and “Grand Canyon Song” resulted.

As I noted earlier Steve was in the process of recording “**High And Outside**,” and by way of a foretaste he performs a segue of three songs from the collection – first, there’s his ‘way before it’s time’ expose on sexual preference “Men Who Love Women Who Love Men,” followed by the bluesy Goodman/Silverstein

co-write "What Have Done For Me Lately?" and he dedicates the upbeat humorous/tender "[I Gotta] Hand It To You" to his wife Nancy. Steve's song "The Family Tree" is the cue for Jethro to join the proceedings, and lyrically inspired by watching late-night television reruns, it's also the first of the aforementioned six previously unreleased tunes. The Buddy Black/Leroy Van Dyke co-write "The Auctioneer" appears between two previously unreleased cover tunes, namely Terry Fell's "Truck Drivin' Man" and Hank Williams' "Lost Highway." In term of the cross that some performers have to bear during their career, Ray Wylie Hubbard's "Up Against The Wall Redneck Mother" is definitely his 'do I have to sing it tonight' albatross, "The Dutchman" fulfils the same role for Michael Smith, and no Goodman performance would be complete without "City Of New Orleans." Cue Steve.....and that train.

The liner of Goodman's final studio recording "**Santa Ana Winds**" [1984] featured a narrative he penned in praise of his musical hero Carl Martin, thereby prefacing the album track "You Better Get It While You Can [The Ballad Of Carl Martin]." By way of elevating his performance to a climactic high, Goodman delivers a rowdy rendition of Martin's "Let's Give A Party" and follows with Jimmie Thomas' "Rockin' Robin" a Fall 1958 # 2 U.S. Pop hit for Bobby Day. Fourteen years later, "Rockin' Robin" was once more a # 2 hit for nascent solo artist, Michael Jackson. The latter pairing are newcomers to Goodman's recorded 'n' released oeuvre, as is the opening encore number. "When The Cubs Go Marching In" amounts to a spontaneous revision of "When The Saints Go Marching In" that name checks Cubs stars of the time, Dave Kingman and Bruce Sutter. Goodman was a lifelong fan, and The Cubs were currently on a roll having defeated the Atlanta Braves 13-7 earlier that day. Dedicating "Old Smoothies" to Chicago jazz violinist Joe Venuti, who had passed that day, Steve closes the show with his tribute to 'folks of mature years.'

In closing, I'd just like to say that in addition to being one hell of a potent songwriter – at one turn he could be rib-achingly witty and in the twinkle of an eye heartrendingly serious - Steve Goodman was also a demon guitar picker. "**Live At The Earl Of Old Town**" proves the latter contention beyond doubt.

Folkwax Score 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 08/06.

Steve Goodman Biography

Steve Goodman was the whole package.

He was a bottle rocket wrapped in blue ribbon; creating the feisty sparks you get from living in Chicago, but dealing the wry kind of blue you get from being a Cubs fan. He was articulate, funny, generous and a hell of a guitar player. Steve's live shows revealed the gifts of a jubilant soul with so much to say.

"Live at the Earl of Old Town" was recorded on August 14, 1978 at the intimate Chicago nightclub that was the launching pad for Steve, John Prine, Bonnie Koloc and many other singer-songwriters. These rare concert tapes were salvaged from the dusty corners of the Chicago Recording Company. They are a celebration of Steve's artistic acumen. Away from the studio, Steve's extended guitar runs incorporated dramatic flamenco, blues, ragtime, swing and country. As a musician, he was bigger than life. People forget that.

Steve was the whole package, but he thought outside the box. He championed the lost treasures of 1930s African-American string musicians Martin, Bogan and Armstrong [Carl Martin's "**Let's Give a Party**" is covered here]. Months before his death in 1984 Steve wrote that mandolinist Martin's "inspiration rules my musical character to this day." Steve picked up his evocative jazz chords from Chicago folk singer Terry Callier, and he was drawn to Jethro Burns like corn to cob. Most people knew Jethro for his role in the Homer & Jethro comedy team. Steve knew Jethro as one of America's premiere mandolin players; so of course, there's Jethro, sitting in with a man-in-the-moon smile on this unique set. Steve also pays tribute to jazz violinist Joe Venuti, who had died suddenly the day of Steve's concert. Joe had been scheduled to appear at a Holiday Inn in downtown Chicago.

Steve's first national tour was as an opening act for Steve Martin. His quick wit and engaging stage presence brought charisma into American folk music. Before Steve, folk singers stood behind a

microphone, strummed a guitar and sometimes even smiled. Steve *played* guitar, and he was a master storyteller, a key ingredient in country music songwriting. After Steve, there was Jimmy Buffett. Buffett collaborated with Steve and admits he learned how to work an audience from watching Steve. "Live at the Earl of Old Town" is a magical transformer into this energy.

Steve is as comfortable singing Bobby Day's 1958 hit "**Rockin' Robin**," as he is bringing Delta blues into the gospel standard "I'll Fly Away," accompanied here by Chicago harmonica ace, Corky Siegel. Shel Silvestein's "Three Legged Man" is covered here, as well as the tropical tinged "**The Family Tree**," a rarely heard Steve composition that indeed would sound at home in a Buffett set. On the day of this concert, the Cubs defeated the Atlanta Braves 13-7. They were just four games out of first place, and Steve was excited. He transformed "When the Saints Go Marching In" into "**When the Cubs Go Marching In**," impulsively chanting the names of Cubs stars like Dave Kingman and Bruce Sutter.

The Cubs finished 11 games out of first place.

That's what being a Cubs fan can do to you. Steve knew how to bring life and humor into the most ordinary situation, but there was nothing ordinary about the sound of Steve Goodman. He is the long summer night of youth, a place where you see fireworks, stars and all the possibilities of American music.

Videotape,
Men Who Love Women Who Love Men,
Banana Republic,
The 20th Century Is Almost Over,
Old Fashioned,
Chicken Cordon Bleus,
This Hotel Room,
Can't Go Back,
You Never Even Call Me by Name,
My Old Man,
I'll Fly Away,
Steve Goodman interview/A Dying Cub Fan's Last Request,
Talk Backwards,
Elvis Imitators,
I Just Keep Falling in Love,
City of New Orleans,
Tico Tico,
The Dutchman,
Souvenirs,
You're the Girl I Love