



## Lucy Kaplansky **"The Red Thread"** Red House Records

Lucy's last two albums **"Ten Year Night"** [1999] and **"Every Single Day"** [2001] scored the Pop Album Award given by the Association For Independent Music, and when the 2004 award nominees are announced I fully expect to see **"The Red Thread"** in the frame. Pursuing the issue of *three in a row*, this is the third consecutive Kaplansky album produced by *stickman* Ben Wittman, while the core of support musicians amount to the already familiar guitar pickers Jon Herington and Duke Levine, Zev Katz on bass, plus, naturally, Ben on drums and percussion.

**"The Red Thread"** is a ten-song collection that breaks down to half a dozen Rick 'n' Lucy originals, and threaded randomly between the foregoing is a quartet of cover tunes. We'll look at the latter initially, and, in terms of running order, the first on the album is Bill Morrissey's "Love Song/New York." When the writer included it on his 1989 album **"Standing Eight,"** the title ran to "Love Song/New York 1982." This is the second occasion on which Kaplansky *the song fan* has covered Morrissey, and in truth, the title pretty much describes the lyrical content. Lucy has been known to perform covers like she created them, and this is one of those occasions. Set to an almost martial beat Bill croaked/growled his way through his rendition, while, set in a lush melodic backdrop, Lucy approaches the lyric as if she and her companion were happily skipping down the street, as is the want of lovers in the first flush of passion. Chiming guitars and a pounding backbeat introduce "Off And Running," the tale of an edgy wanderer, from the pen of Texan songsmith James McMurtry. Yup, his dad's the one that writes books.

Lucy first heard "Cowboy Singer" when Mark Erelli performed the song at the Falcon Ridge Folk Festival, Dave Carter tribute, a matter of days after the song's composer passed. Seventeen years young a *"wide eyed and wistful pretty little Mormon girl"* dreams of becoming a professional singer, and hopes that *this man* she visits will help launch her singing career. In truth *her friend* is close to death – *"I look like the devil, and I feel like hell"* - but listens to her songs nonetheless. I can visualise the twinkle in Dave's eye and his broad smile as he progressively conjured a land where *"The labels don't care if you're old or your young, And the Martins are cheaper,"* while most importantly *"All of the angels are cowboy singers."* As much as she's a Morrissey fan, Lucy is also an admirer of the works of the Millers, Buddy & Julie. "Hole In My Head" is an up-tempo *anti-love song* – *"you took my imagination and stomped it in the ground"* - that Buddy co-wrote with Jim Lauderdale.

Which brings us to the six new creations by Messrs. Litvin and Kaplansky. What can I say, this duo just get better and better, and in summation these songs are a suite, a themed symphony, an irrevocably linked series that springboard thematically between each other maybe for a few words, some lines, possibly verses, while each song retains its own individuality and integrity. **"Every Single Day"** was released on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001. At least three of Rick 'n' Lucy's latest creations are, lyrically, informed by the events of that dark, dark day or occurrences in the aftermath. What also informs these songs, is the happy event that occurred in the closing months of 2003. Lucy and her husband Rick, became the parents of a Chinese born daughter, Molly Fuxiang. It was the culmination of a road that the couple had set out upon almost two years earlier. Irrespective of the obstacles placed in our path, we struggle, we cope, we survive and through it all we ensure that life goes on.....

The album opens with "I Had Something," the *Introduction* to the suite if you will, as Lucy presents one of the themes, that of becoming a parent. That theme is encapsulated in, and frankly can't be expressed better than the chorus, *"Every footstep that I take, completes the circle my love makes, Every living has*

*ties that bind, What I lost returns with love in time.*" As for pinpointing the location of that deliverance, it arrives in the closing couplet of the final verse, *"Another orphan, Waiting for a home."* Having established one parameter, the second cut, "Line In The Sand," opens with *present day snapshots* of how things are in *"this tender troubled world."* Elsewhere, mention that *"Another bomb lights up the night, For someone's vision of paradise"* brings the conclusion that, apart from being *"a wasted sacrifice,"* the escalation of hatred is the main result. Subsequent verses cross-reference Biblical victories and defeats - the crucifixion and the felling of Goliath by David - while the lyric retains an even handed approach in the line *"there's so much blood on all our hands."* The song is also by way of a prayer that closes with *"I hope a forgiving rain will fall sometime, And wash away that line."*

Sonically my first reaction to "This Is Home," was that it was the follow-up to "Ten Year Night." In the opening verse Lucy certainly employs the same confessional style of delivery. The second verse finds Lucy driving home late at night from a gig, while the next imagines how life *currently* pans out for their *soon to be* child with *"She's lying in on a bed in some crowded room, Trying to sleep, not much else to do."* End to end this song is suffused with expressions of eternal love, culminating in a closing verse that balances one reality *"We won't see her first smile, we won't hear her first word,"* with a greater one *"But ours will be the first hearts she holds in her hands."* Pausing for a Kleenex moment, "Land Of The Living" set in New York, focuses upon the *"stories that fell from the sky that day"* and snapshots *"of life in the street"* in the days that followed. The Statue of Liberty, *"She's still holding onto that torch for life"* attests, in the chorus, that in spite of what had occurred, a flame continues to burn.

It's an ancient Chinese belief that when a child is born, [invisibly] a *red thread* reaches out from the child's spirit to all the people who will be part of that child's life. "The Red Thread" is an exposition of the invisible line that links Lucy's mother to her "brown eyed" daughter and onward to Molly Fuxiang. As I said earlier, "Land Of The Living" furnishes snapshots, post 9/11, of life in the streets of New York. Dating from the same time-period, the closing track, "Brooklyn Train" presents images of everyday life in a subway station and on a train. The most telling line in this hymn to survival and continuance is, *"And only the living know what loss means."* Metaphorically, a train could be a *short thread*, while the track that it travels upon is a *much, much longer thread*. All of the railway tracks that intersect and traverse mainland United States could be likened to the arteries of the nation, a pulsating mass of *red threads*. And life, most assuredly, goes on.....

In practically terms, if you're looking for *the red thread*, check out the *in-focus* section of the final colour photograph inside the liner booklet that accompanies this recording.....

Folkwax Rating 10 out of 10

Arthur Wood  
Kerrville Kronikles 01/04

Album Available from : - **Amazon.com** and **CDUniverse**

Original text of Lucy's **"Every Single Day"** is on following page.....

## Lucy Kaplansky “Every Single Day” Red House Records

Accept it, after a quartet of discs, as much as Lucy and her hubby, Rick Litvin, have established an enviable track record by repeatedly turning out quality material, we are never going to get a whole album consisting of only their tunes. Kaplansky's incurable addiction is, and remains, the covering of songs by other scribes and poets. As much as she is a writer and performer, Lucy is a fan. She is also a member of that rare breed, who take a song by another composer and [in performance] make it entirely their own. Sic, track two here - the Celt, Paul Brady, is one of Lucy's long established, favourite composers. Supported by the dual electric guitars of Larry Campbell and Duke Levine, Brady's "Crazy Dreams" is a grab you by scruff of the neck *tour de force* that explores the distress and confusion that ensues when a once white hot passionate affair dims with each passing day. "The Angels Rejoiced Last Night," a forty year old number penned by the Louvin Brothers, is a regular feature of Kaplansky concerts, while Steve Earle's "You're Still Standing There" closed his 1996 *comeback* album "**I Feel Alright.**" The quartet of covers in this collection is completed by the title track of Julie Miller's 1999 solo album. For me, "Broken Things" was the only decent song on an otherwise lacklustre collection. On this rendition Kaplansky is joined on backing vocals by the estimable, Jennifer Kimball. The one from Boston.

On her most recent UK tour, last December, Kaplansky premiered a number of new, or partly completed, Rick n' Lucy tunes. "Written On The Back Of His Hand," which opens this disc being one of them. From a state of innocence and purity at birth, the dawning of each new day brings the opportunity for each of us to learn something new about our universe. The foregoing hopefully explains the concept of what is one of the finest lyrics this New York based couple has fashioned [to date]. What's more, I pray that the closing "*one true word's gonna beat a pack of lies*" is a principle that mankind never loses sight of.

The declining career of a performer who was once "*back lit from inside*" is analysed by the narrator in "Every Single Day." Buddy Miller supplies the backing vocal on the upbeat *let's not pull any punches, because I love you* song "Don't Mind Me," while John Gorka carries out the same duty on the Earle contribution I mentioned earlier, plus the hauntingly honest recollection "Song For Molly." The latter song, featuring the telling line "*It's a dirty trick this growing old,*" is a paean to Lucy's maternal grandmother. Just suspended your disbelief for a moment, and picture this - Lucy, age thirteen, and her mother are paying a visit to her grandmother who is hospitalised. Her description of the building is so stark, you can almost taste the antiseptic. Alas [for the two visitors] Molly's mind is in some other place. Years later, Lucy's mother shows her a ring and adds the words "*this was Molly's, It was her mother's ring, I'm keeping it for you, As she kept it for me.*" The fact that, to this day, Lucy does not recall being a treasured grand-daughter, adds further irony and poignancy to the repeated closing line "*This is what I remember.*" I guess the conclusion is – in this life, we should make every moment count. While long time Kaplansky fans would probably chose the sassy "Ten Year Night," as her finest song, there is a thoughtful maturity to "Song For Molly" which, in my opinion, places it in a league of its own.

And finally, there's the slightly more *down to earth* trio of songs - "Guilty As Sin," "Nowhere" and "No More Lies." Cheating songs are a much-explored genre and "Guilty As Sin" is, at least, a neat pop/rock addition, while an undercurrent of bitterness permeates the narrators words in "Nowhere." Finally, the martial beat of "No More Lies" tells of a cheating husband who has received his deserved comeuppance. While I might appear less enthusiastic about the latter tunes, I would contend that Rick and Lucy have more than done their homework with their other [new] songs – but I guess I've made that clear already.

Folkwax rating – 8 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 08/01

[700 words]