



John Gorka BRIGHT SIDE OF DOWN (Album Review)

If you're familiar with his songwriting shtick, BRIGHT SIDE OF DOWN is a selection of words – and latest album title - that's totally, totally Gorka. Casting a backward glance, RED HORSE (2010) was a collection of covers, reinterpretations and a few new songs with Red House label-mates Lucy n' Eliza. John being the trio virgin, Kaplansky had tampered with the configuration via the turn-of-the-millennium's magnificent Cry Cry Cry and the one-fourth larger, much earlier Fast Folk aberration The Song Project, while Gilkyson *went international* in the short-lived (also) turn-of-the-millennium More Than A Song, alongside Britain's Iain Matthews and Dutchman Ad Vanderveen.

John's latest (solo) studio statement, his twelfth, appears more than four years after its predecessor the drum-less SO DARK YOU SEE (2009). Since 1987 the New Jersey bred, Minnesota adoptee has produced new song collections in a consistent two-or-three year cycle. A longer time coming, on this go-round, BRIGHT SIDE OF DOWN delivers eleven Gorka originals and one cover song, more of which later.

BRIGHT SIDE OF DOWN was recorded, produced and mixed by Rob Genadek at The Brewhouse Recording Studio in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It's Genadek's fifth-consecutive Gorka production; the Bi-Polack guys shared the role in 2009. On this occasion Gorka (vocals, acoustic/high-strung guitars, banjo) was joined in the studio by regulars Genadek (drums, percussion), Dirk Freymuth (electric guitars, high-strung guitars, bouzouki), Jeff Victor (keyboards) and Enrique Toussaint (electric bass) plus Gordy Johnson (acoustic bass), Cale Baglyos Reed (fiddle) and J.T. Bates (drums, percussion).

The SO DARK YOU SEE album cover broke a long established mould. Lacking a Gorka cover photograph, it featured the pastoral artwork of New Hampshire based singer/songwriter and self-taught artist Tom Pirozzoli. The same goes for this new set, and in a short liner note Gorka thanks Tom "...for the line that led to the title song (*I was staying at his house in New Hampshire and, as I was leaving, I said how easy it was to pack away my down winter jacket, and he said "yeah, that's the bright side of down"*)."

Oh how Gorka plays with words.....

Red House label-mate Michael Johnson supplies a guest vocal to up-tempo album opener *Holed Up Mason City*, wherein Gorka recalls driving home following a tour and settling for a motel room after a blinding Iowa blizzard struck – "*Every tenth of a mile I'm slipping ever closer to gone.*" In the early hours of 3rd February 1959, a light aircraft took off from Mason City Municipal Airport. The passengers, never reached their destination and in the words of another song scribe that's "*the day the music died.*" The (fictional) Big Bopper Diner and Holly's ghost feature in Gorka's lyric. Gilkyson and Kaplansky guest on *Bright Side Of Down* a paean to survival. The narrator of *High Horse* has fallen on hard times furthermore "*The neighbourhood's*

gone quiet since the good jobs went south,” options and solutions permeate the *More Than One* lyric, while *Outnumbered* is a subtle and tender love song launched by the confession “*I was never a player, Maybe in song but not in love.*”

Gorka plays keyboards on *Don't Judge A Life* a tender/heartfelt tribute to a friend, the late New Hampshire musician Bill Morrissey – “*Measure a life by what was best.*” The song was debuted during John's contribution to the Somerville Theatre Morrissey memorial concert in mid-November 2011. Another Gorka rendering that evening was Bill's *She's That Kind Of Mystery*, and it's reprised here replete with an Amilia K. Spicer guest vocal. A tentative children's music footstep, *Honeybee* is a dad to daughter offering with mention of her “*...honeybee doodle bro.*” Claudia Schmidt coos and sings with John on the “*Don't put off till tomorrow what you can fail to do today*” *Procrastination Blues*, while *Thirstier World* celebrates the approaching “victory” of spring. Michael Manring's electric bass graces the sly wordplay of the penultimate *Mind To Think*. Aided vocally by Antje Duvekot, the narrator of closer *Really Spring* dreams a rainbow of colours, in his mind having banished winter's white.

A constant and steady hand at the tiller, Gorka's BRIGHT SIDE OF DOWN words and melodies glisten.....

<http://johngorka.com/> and <http://www.redhousetrecords.com/Gorka.html>

From the desk of the Folk Villager.

aka Arthur Wood.

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