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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.

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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.

DAVE HOEKSTRA

CUBS FAN

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