

SHAKE THE SUPERFLUX TO THEM:

Notes Toward the Singular Genius & Generosity of Charlie Parr

ABRAHAM SMITH

TRACKLIST

Last of the Better Days Ahead 3:11
 Blues for Whitefish Lake, 1975 3:51
 Walking Back from Willmar 4:18

 Anaconda 3:46
 Everyday Opus 8:03
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 On Listening to Robert Johnson 5:58

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THE TRUTH

Charlie Parr is a national treasure. A living big flame of vatic song forged and welded by forever roads, in-touch rusts, everyday resurrections, and harmonious parsimonies. A self-taught, selfless master on the resonator and 12-string guitars, Parr's pared-to-the-marrow songster poems shimmer, shiver, and shrive like the bravest of aspens in fall.

National treasures don't just burst on the scene like seismic soap bubbles: they come from a long stretch of highway where ardor

for their art is never arduous. They come from somewhere, and they bridge the gaps between the local and the universal by forging an isthmus between their home place and their influences. Work is play where they come from, and they bring to the stage the magic of making what's difficult, hours spent bent like Picasso's The Old Guitarist over the sound hole, feel as effortless as minutes shimmed with laughter, improvised as spider webs tenting on dewy slim mantises of grasses. And they never cease becoming. There's an exquisite restlessness to what they do. They challenge us to feel the world is new because it is so, if you are paying attention. And man above, is Charlie ever attending-forever wagging his monoclemetal-detector heart across the smallest

things. For Parr, the whatever is a treasure.

On Last of the Better Days Ahead, you are catching a bluesman poet clambered to one of many river bluff peaks to come. It's mostly an afternoon of first and second takes at Erik Koskinen's Devil's Workshop Studio in rural southern Minnesota: songs long lived with; songs caught in the act of living. It's a promise kept. And a wide, good rain of subtle haunters and ruffled healers destined to walk deep into the woods within. It's a skyroof of sympathetic tin. And mercies turned inside out to show the seams of grace: chaff to light and raise a sudden crop of full-eared fire. Wayside. Wayfound. Waygrace. Graceway.

Charlie Parr's new-old hands opening those Hollandale rolling views from his argosy guitar: all such silvered milk and golden honey rolling-pinned clear to your door.

And it's all, all to share around.

THE TRIBUTARIES

Charlie Parr is an isthmus between tributaries.

And he comes from Hormel town, Austin, Minnesota. From Mance Lipscomb. From Spider John Koerner. From Dock Boggs. From the hills and views around Hollandale, Minnesota. From Blind Lemon Jefferson. From Elizabeth Cotten. From Charley Patton. From Son House. From Roscoe Holcomb. From Reverend Gary Davis. From rooming house Minneapolis. From humble leavings unto the banquet heart. From Dave Ray. From Woody Guthrie. From Lead Belly. From Washington Phillips. From Blind Willie Johnson. From driftwood Duluth. From Raymond Carver. From Mississippi Fred McDowell. From Mississippi John Hurt. From Lightnin' Hopkins. From the peaks of well-met sound and the valleys of gutting depression and from all the hardwon, textured plateaus in between. From Kottke. From Bukka White. From Albert

King. From Fahey. From Basho. From Thoreau. From Van Ronk. From Brother Claude Ely.

And he comes from his working-class parents, both of whom jobbed for Hormel but never brought SPAM home. Comes from his mother, hospice volunteer long after her working days. From his sister's records and sewing machine, one and the same. Comes from his father Oren, or Ode as he was always known, whose back-when way north Iowa tenant farming downs and ups the young son caught in his spiderweb souleyes out back by the badger hole. Whose workaday rootedness and Dust Bowl rambling bones the young son caught like a tornado catches a trampoline and pine and potato skins. Every lonesome here-not-here whistle figuring in the calculus of the growing boy.

Whose hodgepodge old blues and old country record collection, lotta heavy Folkways records in there, the very young son steeped and saturated and drew aeroplane dinosaurs in. Bought Charlie his first guitar-a 1965 Gibson B-45 12-string, ramshackle upon arrival-when he was goin' on eight; asked only that he promise never to quit. Nobody around to lesson that old-times sound. Here comes church in front of the giant Motorola console. Who here can become a handful ear? Be sound. With the patience of bees. And so the entrancing retunings began. Go on. As does the road, hard traveling, rest-stop wayside car-chair hotels.

Whose passing when Charlie was 25 changed every thing. Stages of grief are for textbooks, forgotten and flammable. Anybody who's ever lost anything knows that you never stop losing it. You lose it all. Along. The way. The quiet steady rising pandemonium of immovable grief tectonic shudder of elegiac lyrics, words torn out from the stitching of the soul, a wordflood yet to wear out, sandbag, sit still, behave.

Of Ode (b.1922–d.1995), here's Charlie: "He prized the smallest things about life, and could sit in a lawn chair for hours looking at the sky. Or drive aimlessly around the county before finding some random place to pull over and look at the fields. He never bragged, he never lied, he never paid asking price, he had \$20 hidden in his wallet at all times, he loved all animals, he could husk corn faster than anyone, and he told me to learn how to be satisfied with what I have and appreciate the goodness that already exists around me before reaching for more. And once, when I was seven and riding my bike around the neighborhood with my friends, we saw Dad sitting on our front stoop, and all my friends loved him so we stopped to hear what he would say. He was smoking (Salems) and he asked about what we were up to and listened and smiled and told us to enjoy the day and that he was doing the same, and then he pulled a single firecracker out of his shirt pocket and lit it on his cigarette and flicked it out over our

heads where it exploded in the air and he went back into the house."

THE ASCETIC, LUDIC MAN

Oftener than often, Parr's shoes are nowhere around; must be sleepin' like a possum up a windmill. He moves a little like he can hear the lake ice electric, can hear lake ice sighing from clear over here. Moves a little like he can feel the heat up from the earth's core through his canvas Converse loafing-soles. His pants are made from other pants. They're patched enough to be an aerial view of soybean and corn down Austin way. There might be a bobolink nest in his beard. THE MAN MADE OF Sound

Ragged flannel shaman. Desert mystic wrapped up in a lighthouse keeper's coat made from choice '70s bicycle parts. Wears the wizened skin of silence from long stretches on the road on the way, look far to look close, with cups of coffee 'til the water runs dry. A dock unmoored from the widest lake and the lake and the turtle arising through thaw is the best hope for mooring.

Charlie Parr proffers virtuous, virtuosic guitar magic.

All those heavy hours of study and steady practice in his cold room in Duluth, all those shows, often well over 200 a year, all those lean-to burritos bandaged together from greenroom leftovers, all those miles and washed shirts in truckstop sinks, and what we come to hear feels breezy as tomorrow to the trusting and the hale. Guitar magic immediate and urgent as puffballs on the yard. Guitar music glistenin' and falling and rising like wet silt from the nightcrawler upon the wooden lip of the robin ascending to the willow wild and still.

You get the feeling watching Charlie play his Mule resonator, his Guild 12-string, that somebody performed open heart surgery on a steam engine train, ancient heartache machine, carved the whole soul out, and dropped it in this chair. Righthand finger and thumb cocked open thin as a sandhill crane's unison mouth: an adaptation Charlie was forced into from a permanent bout with focal dystonia: something he looked to Doc Watson's two-finger picking for help on: left foot treadlin' like he's inflatin' the sewin'

thread to snakethick: left-hand slide bringin' the slurry, wingin' that angeldevil gravel.

Parr's mesmeric fretwork weaves metalnest crowns for us to dandy in and sound like looser change while we walk along this dirt-road world, often through nickel-dime rain. Listening to his strings ring, I can't help but squirm. Listening, I become a cattail-sunflower-rhubarb hybrid thing: rooted in clay-awake glory, steel rail swaying mine way down up. I feel like two breathless kids shoutin' wild across a half-shorn field. I feel like bees in the wind chimes, snakes shaking the clover. Like dusk bat apnea, like mornin' barnswallow rubberbands. Like tumbleweeds giving CPR to barbed wires. Guitar asks, Can you

get clean from this rust? And my juke feet twist to mime a giddy yep-yep.

THE POET OF LAST OF THE BETTER DAYS AHEAD

Charlie Parr is a restless innovator, 33 steps ahead of himself most mornings.

On his Smithsonian Folkways debut, there's something resoundingly new: the sung poems steer the stung cars here. The faithful will find an even more intense focus upon the word, and folks new to this titan of international folk blues will discover poetry so clear and pure, feels like he wrote it with an icicle on a window. And the singing is more vulnerable and more potent than he's ever done. Emphatic, urgent. Poignancy frequencies. Stir those ears in the muffling soils. Tender and yearning as steaming lambs blinded for a time from being born. Word reworking voice in the way Lake Superior's waves gum the busted bricks and bottles into talismans.

And his poem-lyrics are literatures reeled up from the feathered wells of a deep and varied reading life framed in philosophy and refreshed by the news that when he's not playing, he's reading, and he's always playing, always reading. And reading the world. Parr's X-ray poetries here feel a little like coming upon an owl kill in deep woods; sideways sense of deer haywire trails; natural walking partylines out there along the socked-in shoreline. And their essential bent has never changed: the uncommon common folks and the cast aside, all dug in or drifting and dealing with timed materials. A throughthread Charlie comes by naturally and kaleidoscopically: his working-class raising; his dad's Depression-era days and musics pitched at what it is to be out here in between Wall Street and the Pacific Ocean-ramblin', sufferin', enduring, getting by; his own actualizing of a stuffsparse life; and his last day job, before he hit the bars and roads to troubadour for good, working homeless outreach around Minneapolis and Duluth.

Fierce and tender and true, the poetries of Last of the Better Days Ahead ride at the edges of the shelves of the mind well after the last note intones. And there's manna without expiration on Track 2: "Blues for Whitefish Lake, 1975" and Track 9: "Bed of Wasps." There and there you'll find some of the finest poems set to song I know of. There and there you'll find a singer risking everything for the words. You'll find you hear a stage pulled to pieces. You'll feel the singer has improvised stilts from the heart pine boards. You'll sense he's teetering right above where you perch.

You'll run like a kid under a fly ball under the fitful tree he makes of his elegiac and existential pain, and it's tapping at the upstairs windows now, tappin' like a maple come unbound with a tremble and a trickle and a gush-sincere: freshets of feelings everywhere. There are many mirrors in the guts of these spinning top songs and they all catch at the keyholes: slivers of unguarded truths searchlighting the soul's buttonholes.

Think of the record's name: complicates our relationship with time, as does being alive. We all need others to help us to know time and keep it. That's where Liz Draper's deft bass comes in: Draper daubing and bowing the basements where we all were old soul young once. And where there's one side, there's another. After much poem boon, it's fitting there's some time on Track 11 to mull a spell on the way out the door. Let's not forget, there is more to treasure from Charlie Parr-an intensely devoted listener to all music, especially the trancedriven-space-float experimental kind. "Decoration Day" unfurls improvisational gnosis made at Pachyderm Studios, featuring Parr's side-project, Portal III: Charlie on guitar; Liz on bass; Chris Grey on drums; and they've added Tasha Baron here on keys.

Charlie says, think of B Traven and Paul Bowles alone together on a train leaving Marrakesh for the desert. And so I shut my eyes, turn Track 11 way way up, and here is what I swear on a burning hay bale I hear: It's snowing eyelids. Covered in ways of seeing going arriving right on time. Low slow earthquake lets the waterglasses have their dances, yes. And the vast and silent desert holds water beyond measure in its green bones, yes. And this train is an owl through tag alder, yes it is. Born for me and me alone. My ticket, my tongue; the truth it holds. Only, we are all on here now-the living and the deadshoulder to sole. Only, no: this rattlin' oasis is no mirage. Yes, I can see clear to there now where all of us as one bend to quench: badger, father, deer, bear, bobcat, porcupine, pine marten, fisher, mother, mastodon.

SHAKE THE SUPERFLUX

Wild King Lear out in the wild rain looked until he saw, the rain running down on the blood in his eyes, and what he saw was a people, his people, in need of plenty, and here he'd always had it all to give.

Surely the last of our better days are ahead. And Charlie's soon to be somewhere near wherever this record finds you. Playin' good bread to tear. Singin' good pies to bake and frisbee to the next one walks by. Hear Lear. Hear Parr. Share. You share. Share it all around.

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Ogden, Utah March 5, 2021

LAST OF THE BETTER DAYS AHEAD

Lyrics and Notes by Charlie Parr

"Last of the Better Days Ahead is a way for me to refer to the times I'm living in. I'm getting on in years, experiencing a shift in perspective that was once described by my mom as 'a time when we turn from gazing into the future to gazing back at the past, as if we're adrift in the current, slowly turning around.' Some songs came from meditations on the fact that the portion of our brain devoted to memory is also the portion responsible for imagination, and what that entails for the collected experiences that we refer to as our lives. Other songs are cultivated primarily from the imagination, but also contain memories of what may be a real landscape, or at least one inspired by vivid dreaming. The album represents one full rotation of the boat in which we are adrift—looking ahead for a last look at the better days to come, then being turned around to see the leading edge of the past as it fades into the foggy dreamscape of our real and imagined histories."

- CHARLIE PARR

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OVERVIEW:

These songs feel more like poems to me than songs, and I've kind of let them have their way in that respect. The music serves these lyrics, rather than the other way around, which is the way I usually organize songs. Instead of trying to stick words to a more or less rigid framework of chords or melody, I've let them have their lead, and the music has evolved accordingly. So this is a kind of experimental record for me, and I'm sure the songs will show up in performances wearing different clothes than they're sporting here.

Charlie Parr, vocals, 12-string, resonator, and baritone resonator guitars Liz Draper, electric bass, upright bass ("On Listening to Robert Johnson," "Rain," "Decoration Day") Tasha Baron, keyboards ("Decoration Day") Chris Grey, drums ("Decoration Day")

1. LAST OF THE BETTER DAYS AHEAD

It's one thing to be able to say that I'm not what I own or what I do, but it still leaves behind the original question of what am I unanswered. I think that's perfectly fine, and this is a song about accepting uncertainty.

Money can't buy back that '64 Falcon that you sold in your 20s and then regretted it was gone because you thought it contained some meaning or some answers to a life that you never bothered to question or even take a good close look at

And it broke your heart to see how it had been so important from the feeling of the steering wheel to the rubber on the road and now it's grown to unrealistic proportions in your mind

Now you're in your 50s why can't you forget how the chrome bumpers shined in the sun if you could just go back even for a minute you could forget how you don't even know what it was you've lost Why do you always feel so empty in spite of all you have were those feelings you remember even real and were they honestly about some junky old Falcon or any other thing that you could own

Because now it's all so stale and you feel so very old like you've taken all your chances and tossed them all aside for some stupid piece of metal like shiny bits of trash that line the stolen nest of a greedy neighborhood crow

So you drive back to your hometown to visit with your past but nothing looks the same anymore except you can see all that you squandered while you were shining all that chrome you were handed all you needed without cost but you were too blind to see it and you took it all for granted now you wanna complain—tell me just what was it that you've lost

And now you start to panic and your gas is running low and you need to find some meaning before you're stranded on the road and when the engine finally dies near a soybean field at dusk you just sit and watch the sunset turn the entire sky to rust

2. BLUES FOR WHITEFISH LAKE, 1975

It was in the mid-1970s, maybe, when I went fishing with my Dad, and since the fish weren't biting we went to the far end of the lake and up a long wooden staircase to a bar that I hadn't been able to see from the water at all. The bartender knew my Dad and gave me a grape soda, and even though I'm sure my memory of it is all wrong, like memories tend to be, I long for that little bit of time every now and then.

Heading across the lake in my little boat A surface of glass I am bound for a notch in the trees Rotting wooden steps It's difficult to see in the waning light Of northland's October evening (concentrate on the pool of water that travels from bow to stern) I have a small outboard, lent to me by my uncle In need of slight repair It feels like it's taking forever To reach the farthest shore When I see a scrap of neon Floating like a balloon caught in the trees (concentrate on the darkening tree line, concentrate on the sinking dock)

I can hear voices from above me On the steepest part of the bank And listen for the voice of my father In the midst of the pines There is a bar at the top of the staircase Hidden amongst the leaves (concentrate on the face of my father, concentrate on the last shirt I saw him wear) There is an aging fishing boat at the dock Mostly sunk into the mud The steps are all but gone now Rotten to my tread I cling to branches to keep from slipping The rain is coming on (concentrate on never falling, concentrate on never climbing back down)

3. WALKING BACK FROM WILLMAR

Dedicated to a cold morning at a remote rest area in eastern Wyoming when I woke up to find my van had been joined in the night by several vehicles all with sleeping inhabitants fogging up their windshields except for a station wagon with foil on all the windows and bible verses written in marker all over the outside. The steeple in the distance is lit by a neon cross (2)

But when he got to the door for mercy's sake, he found it to be locked

Tony was a security officer down at the trailer yard (2)

He lived in an abandoned reefer, at the far end of the trailer lot

Sometimes he'd come to town, a stray dog trailing at his heels (2) All the stray dogs love Tony because he knows exactly how it feels

He might ask you for some change, Lord knows he's a volunteer (2) Keeping an eye out for his family, keeping all his close friends near

Sleeping down on the cold ground will wear your muscles out (2) There ain't nothing colder than the agent's heart when he's kicking you off that Willmar shot

Tony says he'll tramp down south but no one's seen him make a move to leave (2) He just shrugs his shoulders and smiles how he'll catch out next spring The steeple in the distance is lit by a neon cross (2)

But when he got to the door for mercy's sake, he found it to be locked

4. ANACONDA

I had a friend who could fix anything with whatever odds and ends he had lying around the house. His favorite material for nearly any repair was wire hangers, and if you stayed in his guest room there were never any hangers in the closet. This song is not about him, but it's named for his hometown of Anaconda, Montana, where I ate in a cool old diner and viewed the tallest freestanding smokestack in North America.

On a long flat highway in a hail-damaged Chevrolet

A young woman dreams about her escape From a way of life to which she cannot relate Poor and thin, her options are very slim Discouraged and abused by all of her kin Where to begin Chorus

This world looks like it's built for just one kind And everybody else is gonna have to sit at the side

Where they'll never ever be allowed to drive But that's all a lie, so they can keep all the pie, all the time

So this woman feels like she's all alone And the house and the town have never felt like home

And the message at her school is designed to keep her down

Just calm down, and sit back down And follow our crowd, and whoever else is around

Chorus

I live in a shipping crate over near the docks And build my furniture out of pallets and rocks And no one's gonna tell me how I live is wrong Where I feel welcome is where I'll call my home Don't judge folks whose path is not your own Let 'em alone

Chorus

5. EVERYDAY OPUS

Loneliness feels very sharp at around 3:30 a.m. when you need to be somewhere and you don't really have any attachment to where you live.

The streets in this part of town are all made out of dirt

And there aren't any streetlights for when I get up to go to work

The road grader comes once in a while to fill in all the holes

And leave a ridge of gravel to trip me as I go

There aren't any sidewalks here, just ditches into yards

And folks get kind of upset when you're walking through their lawn

So I keep it on the roadway and try to move along

If they see me when they're driving they'll always blow their horn

All up and down this street these houses all look the same

In the graying of the twilight I can't recall a single name

Of any of my neighbors or the faces of their kids

Only the kinds of cars they drive and if their dogs are tied

Chorus

Walking in these shoes isn't as easy as you'd like Dodging all the bricks that are breaking all my lights

We all have to struggle and hold it as our truth It's about as special for me as it is for you

Now I'm on the highway overpass waiting for the bus

To take me to my job in a downtown office cleaning up

The scraps of paper nonsense that the office workers throw

Into waste bins full of chewed gum and empty cans of Faygo

But I don't know who they are or even how they look

I only know the jokes they have pinned up in their nook

This one likes football, that one has a pup Here's one who's real messy and never picks it up

I clean it up before they arrive and head out to my bus

Or maybe I'll stay downtown and get a little lunch

At the diner near my job if I have some extra cash

Or maybe I'm too tired today so I'll go home to crash

Chorus

I keep all the doors shut to the other rooms in my house

That I don't want to heat and no one lives here now

But me and I don't take up very much space Just the front room with my bed and the kitchen and the bath

I'll make a little supper and watch a little TV I usually feel too restless to find a book and read So I eat too many chips and drink too many beers

And the evening drains away and I fall asleep in my chair

Sometime on a weekend I think I'll visit a friend And remember all our old times and see how they have been

But it feels like a lot of effort to explain myself again

So I'll just wait and see if they'll visit me instead

Chorus

I woke up the next morning before my alarm could go off

I was fuzzy from the beer and too tired to get up I tried calling in to my boss but she wouldn't answer her phone

I can't afford to lose this job so I put some coffee on

I pulled on the same clothes I had on the night before

No one ever saw me anyway it never mattered what I wore

So I locked the door behind me and I started on my walk

Along my gravel street and downtown to my work

6. ON FADING AWAY

Jimmy gave me a copy of Harlan Hubbard's Payne Hollow once when I was heading through Colorado on my way to Oregon, and I read and re-read it again before I got back home to Duluth. Then I read it over again after I got home. I've tried to keep its gentle lessons to pay careful attention both within myself and within the world ever since.

I was walking down by Hobson's Creek, in the morning just before it rained (2) The path was slick and I stumbled again and again

I was soaking wet from the night before, shivering to the bone, but I was moving just the same (2)

The matches in my pocket all ruined from the rain

I saw a flatboat on the river, the rain started coming down hard (2)

I was used to being wet and did not wipe my face at all

I paddled to the current and lay down in the

bottom and I drifted in the storm (2) I could hear the river through the boat like it was knocking on a door

I wanted to drift with the river and follow it all the way to the gulf (2) The rhythm of the water put me out just like a drug

I had drifted down for miles and I knew I could not drift back up (2) The clouds were clearing and I put my matches out to dry in the sun

7. 817 OAKLAND AVENUE

I'm so grateful for the fortune of friendship and for my parents, who always told me to value those relationships above all else. This is a song about gratitude, inspired by and dedicated to my friends.

Can you remember what it's like When all the world's filled with light Now do you have that in your sight Then spread it around, do Spread it all around, do Then spread it around, do

Have you felt joy in your days Even though you've had your share of pain What does hoarding that joy gain Then spread it around, do Spread it all around, do Then spread it around, do

Has your belly ever been full And have you fed your family too Does your table have just a little more room Then spread it around, do Spread it all around, do Then spread it around, do

Are your blankets soft and warm Does the roof above you keep out the storms Can you save someone else from being cold Then spread it around, do Spread it all around, do Then spread it around, do

It's true about love It'll die if it's covered up It's got to be all given away So we can all feel the heat of its rays

Can you remember what it's like When all the world's filled with light Now do you have that in your sight Then spread it around, do Spread it all around, do Then spread it around, do

8. ON LISTENING TO ROBERT JOHNSON

Walking at night usually leads to some alternative perspective or other. At the very least the light is different and your familiar neighborhood becomes a different place. Then someone plays music out their window that you only ever heard at home, and that music takes on a whole new atmosphere and you're transfixed and unable to walk away until it's done playing, and even if you run home as fast as you can and put that exact same record on, it'll never sound that way again.

It was a bleak summer night and I was walking, no particular place to go

I would walk into a circle, and come right back to the place I was at before

It was hot and had been raining, humid even at 2 a.m.

The streets were wet and the grass was soaking, there was no dry place to lay my head

Deep blue fell from the night sky, bleached to gray under the overhead lamps All the shadows were 3 dimensions, like you could crawl right inside and camp

I heard music down the avenue that punctured right through the traffic sounds Harsh and sweet all at the same time, and I hurried to follow it down

I stopped outside a gray house near the alley, and found my way to the sound I could hear the music clearly, and I lay myself down on the ground

I was taken to meet the devil, and I trembled in the pouring rain I took a ride in a fast car, next to a woman named Betty Mae

I woke up to the blues, it was walking, blues

walking like a man I was a barroom clown, I was stumbling, stones all in my path

I carried my baby's suitcase, down to the waiting train While the blues fell down, just like rain

It all ended with the sunrise, I tried to get to my feet

The music still played in my aching heart, it was such perfect poetry

9. BED OF WASPS

The best parts of my life have all taught me backwards into knowing that I don't actually know anything at all.

Don't let him through that door I can't bear to never see him anymore The coincidence of our accord Has been misunderstood for years and more I can't stand to be alone But there's no one else I can be around I know I can't keep him here with me But I don't know how to set us free Time is a game played by smarter beings I'm lost in a fog trying to know what it means If I were to lose track of the path I was on Would I float away or simply find another one Why is it so hard to see past your own nose Time is an illusion So it goes

Please don't let her leave I know she won't be back again Did I hold on too tight When I tried to be her friend Does it mean so much more to me That I might try and apprehend Her time which is her own And never has been mine

All this space that we share How much do I really know Assumptions I've made about her Are only mine and never show The true nature of this room Please let me see without my eyes Space is coincidence So it goes

Our lives are intertwined But it's not the act of you or I It could be anyone else And it wouldn't cost me any less The universe is made of sails With no rudder turning into the gale It's meaningless to speculate From inside the ship they're all just waves

If I could embrace the eternal moment And shrug off the past like an unwelcome blanket

If only the future didn't haunt my dreams I awaken too early trying to figure what it means

Are my nightmares actually what's real I sleep in a bed of wasps So it goes

10. RAIN

This is a song inspired by Woody Guthrie, who had the gift of inhabiting another's experience and communicating it to the world.

When I was a migrant crossing the desert plains My daughter in a backpack that I'd made out of plants

My wife I left behind me with our baby at her breast

And her aging mother in an aging canvas tent Go for help, they begged with tears all in their eyes

In my homeless brethren sandals while nails rained from the skies

Our hands our feet our hearts ain't they all the same

If you were left out here with me wouldn't you feel the rain

When I was so thirsty living in my home And the water taps gave out poison so I couldn't drink none

When the neighbors all around me turned their thirsty eyes downtown

The company that carried the blame wouldn't even hear us out

Our hands our feet our hearts ain't they all the same

If you were left out here with me wouldn't you feel the rain

When I was so sick and I couldn't catch my breath

And all the air around me was tinted with my death

And no one could come near me and I was all alone

My pockets filled with money and nothing to spend it on

Our hands our feet our hearts ain't they all the same

If you were left out here with me wouldn't you feel the rain

When I was so helpless and I had lost my voice And I was so frightened by all the hateful noise When I couldn't bear to raise my head above the safety of the mud

And I simply sank below the surface never to come up

11. DECORATION DAY

Instrumental music is a landscape to me, a sound-visualization of a certain place, in full color, sometimes oversaturated with light and movement. "Decoration Day" was the day we tended the graves of our family and thought about that small bit of history that pertains to us specifically. The landscape of this song is a small graveyard just south of Britt, Iowa; others on the outskirts of Oakland and Hollandale, Minnesota; another south of Austin, Minnesota, on your way to Lyle, where my out-of-focus eyes see the resurrected figures of my childhood sitting in lawn chairs outside a farmhouse.

CREDITS

Produced by Charlie Parr, Liz Draper, and Erik Koskinen Recorded and mixed by Erik Koskinen at Real Phonic Studios, Cleveland, MN, January 13, 2021 "Decoration Day" recorded and mixed by Tom Herbers at Pachyderm Studios, November 11, 2020 Mastered by Huntley Miller Essay by Abraham Smith Track annotations by Charlie Parr Executive producers: Daniel E. Sheehy and John Smith Production manager: Mary Monseur Production assistant: Kate Harrington Editorial assistance by Carla Borden Cover art by Abe Partridge Photo inside jacket gatefold by Ivy Vainio; photos in liner notes insert by Shelly Mosman Art direction, design, and layout by Matthew Curry at Boyvsdragon Studios

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1. Last of the Better Days Ahead 2. Blues for Whitensh Lake, 1975 3. Walking Back from Wilsmar 4. Anaconda 5. Everyday Opus 6. On Fading Away 7. 817 Oakland Avenue 8. On Listening to Robert Johnson 9. Bed of Wasps 10. Rain 11. Decoration Day

(All songs written by Charlie Parr/Little Judges Music, ASCAP) Produced by Charlie Parr, Liz Draper, and Erik Koskinen

LC 9628

Charlie Parr's newest album, Last of the Better Days Ahead, is a collection of powerful new songs about how one looks back on a life lived, as well as forward on what's still to come. Its spare production foregrounds Parr's poetic lyricism, his expressive, gritty voice ringing clear over deft acoustic guitar playing that references folk and blues motifs in Parr's own exploratory, idiosyncratic style.



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