

Steve Earle: The Revolution Starts Now
November. 2004

This morning as I drove to work I stopped at a traffic light next to an SUV whose driver had the the radio cranking. I recognized pop country music from the predictable production, but when the lyrics became clear I realized they were those of the great American bard Woody Guthrie. “This land is your land this land is my land.” Even through the tinted glass I recognized a flag waving sentiment that would have probably put Guthrie’s teeth on edge. It was true popular music of the great American car dealership variety. I envisioned Woody spinning tight circles in the confines of a cheap pine box. So, I took a few deep breaths, slid the new Steve Earle CD into my player and relaxed.

The Revolution Starts Now would make Woody stop his spinning, and rest easy that America in the twenty-first century isn’t completely in the toilet.

There’s a world of places where folks dissatisfied with their government are unable to voice their dissatisfaction for fear of reprisals. Steve Earle is concerned that the United States is quickly turning into another one of these places. So he’s decided its time to step forward and scream a cry of warning to us all. Better yet, he’s decided a call to action is necessary.

Hoping to incite us to a new American revolution, he sings:

“When you rise above your fears
And tear the walls around you down
The revolution starts here
Where you work and where you play
Where you lay your money down
What you do and what you say
The revolution starts now”

Not since the hey day of Union organizing saw Woody Guthrie’s guitar fight fascism has there been an American songwriter so politically astute or so willing to tell it like it is – no holds barred. Using vehicles of flat out rock n’ roll, ripping two steps, romping bluegrass escapades, or sweet folk/country ballads, Steve Earle’s lyrics cut to the quick and tell tales of citizens reassessing their country, their politics, their responsibilities, and what the future might hold with or without action.

His disenfranchised common folk aren’t just US citizens, either. ‘Rich Man’s War’ tells of Americans and Palestinians alike being duped into militancy by the interests of men in power, while ‘The Gringo’s Tale’ finds root in the story of an expatriate American soldier of fortune.

For years Earle has been recording album after album of song craft – refining his story telling, honing his production skills with the help of long time creative partner Ray Kennedy, and walking the thin line of artist and politico. This album brings us a collection of songs that are unflinching, relentless and bold. From the call to arms of the title track on through the prayer and promise of a Texas truck driver dodging R.P.G’s in Basra, and even in the tongue-in-cheek ‘Condi,’ a love song to the new Secretary of State, Earle gives us a glimpse of what American songwriters can be. Earle shows us a

vision of the craft that doesn't include douching the craft with corporate sponsorship or dumbing down the language to monosyllabic clichés.

As I listen to this record, I am clearly aware of Earle's heritage without feeling that he has betrayed those roots... or abused them. He proudly wears the moniker of bad boy voice of reason in a field of milksops. And he does so with a brave swagger that makes songs like 'Fuck the FCC' burn bright and true.

Been called a traitor and a patriot
Call me anything you want to but
Just don't forget your history.
Dirty Lenny died so we could all be free.
So fuck the FCC.
Fuck the FBI,
Fuck the CIA,
Livin' in the Mother Fucking USA

I imagine Earle was cursing a lot more than the FCC November 3rd. Or perhaps he just got good and drunk. But when he sobers up I feel assured that the fires of Earle's creative engine will be stoked to bring on another incredible series of songs. I look forward to it.

In the meantime, I think I'll crank up my car stereo and roll down the windows.