

Steve Goodman: Facing the Music

By Clay Eals

ECW Press (Toronto, Ont.), 2007,

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Everybody who ever knew Steve Goodman loved and treasured him deeply.

There's nothing else you can think after reading Clay Eals' mammoth, incredibly complete biography of Steve Goodman. He interviewed 1067 people for the book (all listed in an appendix). All were generous and forthcoming about the remarkable Mr. Goodman. With this much data Eals could follow Steve's life virtually day by day from childhood.

Short form of the story: intelligent, energetic, well-liked Chicago kid with a bright future is diagnosed with leukemia at 20. In response he packed his life as densely as he could wasting not a second. He filled virtually every minute with joy, love, family, friends and accomplishment. A top notch songwriter ("City of New Orleans" is only the tip of the iceberg), an emotional and endearing singer and a fabulous guitarist, he was the true total package. He'd sing funny and sad, sweet songs one after another, any song from any age he felt like singing, anything the moment called for regardless of genre.

Fair disclosure: I am one of those 1067 interviewees. Clay misunderstood me. On page 452 he writes how I "emulated Steve since the early 1970s." Not exactly correct. I had been a solo folk performer in the '60s. By the early '70s I had given that up for

FM radio. When I first saw Steve play live, I recognized the very embodiment of what I had tried to do but didn't have the chops to realize: a whip smart performer who could roll with the moment better than anybody else ever, both hilarious and heart-breaking. Great songwriter. Great jam player who loved to listen while he played. Wish I could have been a tenth of what he was on stage. I'm not alone.

The book is admittedly more complete and detailed than anyone could have expected. But that's just like Steve who would nearly always deliver more and better than he needed to. It can be an exhilarating and enlightening if exhausting read. I could only absorb so many pages at a time due to the intensity of the subject. Besides my arms would get tired holding up the 4-1/2 pound book.

I love the design and layout. The pages leave wide margins for pictures and there are insightful quotes on nearly every page. Also room for footnotes to appear right with the passages they enhance.

The accompanying CD has 18 songs various folks from all over wrote about or were inspired by Steve. To a one, all emotional, caring songs and performances. It concludes with a really nice interview with Steve, thus making the sound of his voice part of the package.

In the end a quote from the comic book *Sandman*. The character Death, a cute and appealing young thing in appearance who was embracing instead of scary, would say, "You get what everyone gets: a lifetime." Long or short, a lifetime. Steve Goodman packed more life into his time than many do with double the time than he had. All of us who knew him, even if only from the audience, are ever thankful he did. — MT