



## The View from Right Field

by Rick Ohler

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“That’s the Way the World Goes  
‘Round”

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When we awoke to the news that John Prine had been done in by the insidious coronavirus on the morning of April 8, my sweetheart and I spent an extra while snuggled together, wrapped in melancholy, listening to his music and watching his YouTube videos. Hey, it’s not like we had to be somewhere.

We weren’t the only ones in mourning; you could almost hear the sadness across the country and across the generations. If Covid-19 hadn’t been before, now, the ruthless virus had become personal, and cruel. Prine, the singing mailman, an unlikely folk music success story if ever there was one, had already beaten cancer twice to solidify his position as songwriting’s equivalent of the nation’s poet laureate. Even Their Royal Eminences, Dylan and Springsteen, had suggested that Prine’s was the authentic American voice. And now he was gone, gone because he was a congregationalist at heart—a reluctant studio musician who was more comfortable on stage, singing to a crowd.

He remains with us, of course, because he did occasionally go into the studio. There were 23 albums in 49 years, including the 2018 masterpiece *The Tree of Forgiveness*, that, little did he know, would be his swan song, and where he sang these prophetic words:

*Yeah, when I get to heaven,  
I’m gonna take that wristwatch off my arm.  
What are you gonna do with time.  
After you’ve bought the farm?*

So many songs became classics: the Vietnam-era elegy “Sam Stone;” the mournful ballad “Angel From Montgomery”—probably his best known song thanks to Bonnie Raitt’s iconic cover; the counter-culture, hand-rolled anthem “Illegal Smile;” the delightfully poignant ballads “Jesus—the Missing Years” or “Come Back To Us Barbara Lewis Hare Krishna Bearegard;” the hilarious, satirical country music

send up “You Never Even Call Me By My Name;” the oxymoronic “Paradise,” or some that are plain old lascivious fun like “Let’s Talk Dirty in Hawaiian.” You’ll have your own favorites, no doubt.

And the lyrics—c’mon, they are the best. Like the playfully naughty, “The topless lady had something up her sleeve.” Or the remedial for a respite from the modern world:

*Blow up your TV;  
Throw away your paper;  
Go to the country;  
Build you a home.*

The self-satisfied:

*No, we're not the jet set; we're the old Chevro-let set.  
There's no Riviera, in Festus, Missouri.  
And you won't find Onassis, in Mullinville, Kansas.  
No, we're not the jet set; we're the old Chevro-let set,  
but ain't we got love.*

The self-knowing:

*In spite of ourselves,  
We'll end up a-sittin' on a rainbow  
Against all odds,  
Honey, we're the big door-prize.*

I didn’t set out to make this column all about John Prine; I can’t expect that all readers of the world’s best hometown newspaper love him as much as I did. (If you’re unfamiliar with him, punch up John Prine on Youtube, and you’ll see what the fuss is about.) I have only so much say in the direction these columns head, since they tend to have minds of their own. But the more I wrote as the fifth week of isolation shuffled out of the starting gate in no particular hurry, the more I realized what a valuable guy he would have been to have around right now during these weirdest of all times. He could understand that social isolation was a terrible problem, especially for those who are older, perhaps alone and unable to receive a visitor. Look what he wrote at age 25 in a song called “Hello in There”:

*Ya know that old trees just grown stronger,  
And old rivers grow wider ev’ry day.  
Old people grow lonesome  
Waiting for someone to say, ‘Hello in there.’*

And then, 25 years later when he was nearing 50, he encapsulated what’s happening today as we experience, on one hand near total isolation, but on the other more constant contact with people via Zoom, Facetime, phone and social media than ever before. From his album *Lost Dogs and Mixed Blessings*:

*We are the lonely all together;  
All together we're all alone.*

I was about to get on with the actual point of this week's offering, which would involve an insightful (hopefully) discussion about how living in unfolding history without knowing the outcome (a pandemic, for instance) differs from studying past history where we know the outcome (Super Bowl XXV, the Revolutionary War, etc.), when Kateri brought up an even more pressing current event.

"Why," she asked with alarm, "do you have two Instagram accounts?"

"I don't," I said.

"Well, you do now, and whoever is responsible for 'rick\_ohler2,' is pretending to be you and is trying to scam people into giving them their financial information in order to rob them."

Damn. I'd been hacked. Well, it wasn't so much hacked; it was more like being cloned. The scurrilous, invidious, flagitious, heinous (RIP Snake, you get four this week—I'm *that* angry) crooks were trying to start conversations with my Instagram followers, pretending to be me, trading on the many friendships I have for nefarious purposes. By mid-morning we had heard that at least one friend had engaged with the thieves, hopefully realizing her mistake before the damage was done. Damn them.

Instagram, I had thought, offered social media users a kinder, gentler option compared to Facebook. Not so heavy on politics, not as much character assassination, not as rife with unsubstantiated blather. Instagram seemed to lean toward more benign posts where friends and families gathered (virtually) to share their pets, their vacations, their gardens, their meals and, now, their tips on surviving coronasolation. However, I am almost 70; it should not come as a surprise that the bad guys are evolving with the times and the technology.

Nor should it come as a surprise that my old friend John Prine already knew this. In 2005, he wrote:

*Some humans ain't human,  
Some humans ain't kind;  
You open up their hearts,  
And here's what you find:  
A few frozen pizzas,  
Some ice cubes with hair,  
A broken Pop-sicle;  
You don't want to go there.*

*Some humans ain't human,  
Though they walk like you do,*

*They live and they breathe  
Just to turn the old screw.  
They screw you when you're sleeping,  
They try to screw you blind.  
Some humans ain't human,  
Some people ain't kind.*

I was tempted to end here, all hot and bothered and dispirited. But Debby Downer isn't our style out here in Right Field. We've seen so much generosity and cooperation in our little corner of the world lately, that I have to regard this as a blip on the radar. So I'll wash my hands, put on my mask and let Mr. Prine have the last word.

*I was sitting in the bathtub counting my toes,  
When the radiator broke, water all froze.  
I got stuck in the ice without my clothes,  
Naked as the eyes of a clown.  
I was crying ice cubes hoping I'd croak,  
When the sun come through the window, the ice all broke.  
I stood up and laughed thought it was a joke.  
That's the way that the world goes 'round.*