REVIEW · BLUES

1922 Blues | Charlie Parr

It sounds like an old 78. Decades later it turns up in a Vodafone ad.

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The music seems to come out of an old 78, with dust crackling between one note and the next: **hiss, hiss**. The sound is **dry, scratched, ancient, intimate and familiar**. Then it reappears, decades later, on the soundtrack of a Vodafone commercial. The past opens a door onto the present, like a photograph that suddenly starts to speak.

Charlie Parr grew up in Minnesota, in a working-class family. He discovered folk and blues listening to his father's records, taught himself to play and also worked in outreach for people without a home. He prefers to call himself a folksinger rather than lock himself into a rigid bluesman identity.

The 1922 of the title is tied to his father's memory and to the values Parr says he received from him. The music looks back, but it does not build nostalgia for a golden age. It is a family bond, not an exercise in antiquarianism: here the past is a voice that keeps knocking, softly but persistently, like an old record spinning in the next room.

Then the song takes an unexpected road. In Australia and New Zealand it reaches a much wider audience thanks to a Vodafone commercial. The old voice walks into one of the most commercial places imaginable, and the contrast is sharp: a song that seems to come from another era falls into step with the present. Parr, though, does not reduce the story to a clash between pure art and advertising: he has also spoken about the work it takes to make a living and the importance of keeping control over licensing.

A song can change context without losing its first story. It can belong to the memory of a father and, at the same time, become the music someone meets in front of a screen. Meaning is a road that forks: whoever wrote it does not control every turn. Its second life is **unexpected, broad, commercial, popular and unpredictable**, like an old traveller who finds himself on a new road.

> ***Does a song change if our first encounter with it happens not in front of a stage, but inside an advertisement?***

LISTEN

1922 Blues — Charlie Parr — is in our playlist Acoustic Blues, Roots & Dust.

Charlie Parr. Updated every Friday. Selected by ear.