

Ciaran Berry

LINER NOTES



Gallery Books

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Statler and Waldorf

More and more the discourse moves away from us,
as with that idyll of a time, perhaps illusory,

that was ours and ours alone, the tie and top button
of where it all began, the tuning fork,

the silver spoon that segues to our colloquy
and critique up here, where we attempt to sort

the Gorgs from the Doozers, just a couple
of financiers near dotage eager to see how

the farce unfolds on set, even if, in the end-up,
we must accept we're just like all the rest

of these Muppets, and not much more
than foam rubber dressed in a doll's clothes,

our basic skeleton the selfsame unseen hand
that, in the pit, strikes up the band, has the cast sing

'Why Can't We Be Friends?' or 'Take a Chance',
whatever number sets in motion the whole shaboogie

and shebang, which seems chaos at first,
then takes a form, adopts the week's loose theme,

a murder mystery or a camping trip, into the seams
of which are sewn some ongoing intrigue

or running gag, the on/off romance of a pig and frog,
or the hapless bear in the polka-dot scarf

trying his latest sad excuse for a stand-up routine
against our nudge, wink and guffaw, one

of us playing the wiseacre, the other the straight man
as we man the border only the likes of us

can still discern between high and low culture,
even if a civil servant singing the Pest Control code

in the key of F is as heady as it ever gets round here,
where, whether our guest-star mimes perform

'Robots Having Breakfast' or 'Cowboys Playing Cards',
we end up with the same spilled milk and cereal,

the blush in our cheeks starting to reveal
a little too much midweek red meat and rosé

as we do our best to keep buoyant this economy
of laughter and applause, what began as sketch

and storyboard become this smorgasbord
that, in the end, will have us all speaking Swedish.

Twister

I was thinking of us spread arm over leg, spreadeagled
if you will, as we watched the sky turn green over a
Carbondale

strip mall. In the Hunan restaurant we'd picked the red
snapper clean, leaving intact just the backbone, the head

and tail, as with the coin we might have flipped once in a
basement
to settle who'd call the colours and who'd call the limbs.

We were one foot in the yellow, the other in the blue,
as the Doppler radar tracked the squall's latest moves

from the Storm Center in Norman, Oklahoma, its cut
and thrust putting us in mind of that thirty-five-foot

twister of muslin and chicken wire that, in Kansas, in 1939,
would touch down soon on the Gale family farm,

where Uncle Henry and those three shiftless farmhands,
who will become the Scarecrow, Lion, and Tin Man,

try to stop the horses from bolting before bolting up
the barn. As it is when Dorothy — played for a few shots

by Bobbie Koshay and not Judy Garland — throws open
the door
on Munchkinland, we'd stepped from sepia to technicolour

by way of tea-smoked duck, a little too much plum wine.
It was all painted backdrop, all artificial flower and vine

when you yelled out 'right leg' and I answered 'green'.
We both waited for the other to topple onto an elbow or
a knee

as the updraft passed through Jonesboro or Pinckneyville,
gathering to its core a rowboat, a rocking chair, a woman
on a bicycle.