

BRIAN SHARPE: *The Usual Stories & Usual Lies*

The best singer/songwriters have the ability to transport listeners inside of their songs. Weaving verbal tapestries, intertwined with unforgettable melodies, the artist creates a scene that comes to life with each phrasing and strum of the guitar.

On his debut, *The Usual Stories & Usual Lies*, Brian Sharpe's smoky, slightly raspy, yet warm and knowing voice spins the musical flax over a range of subject matter. His songs proffer forth musical commentary about love, loss, hope, dreams, and just a touch of New York geography. Though his range is a bit limited, Sharpe does an impressive job of touring around his vocal neighborhood – never over stretching, or taking the easy way out.

The disc opens strong with the upbeat propulsion of Long Island Sound and Candystore Dropout. Sharpe's fingers dance across the fret board, but never in a flashy or obtrusive way. A talented musician (he played multiple instruments, in addition to producing and recording the disc), Sharpe knows how to augment his songs with clever touches of a Hammond organ or backwards tape loop. Of course, the studio trickery is kept to a minimum, as not to shift the focus away from the lyrics and melody, where they belong.

When Sharpe sings that “You used to give me such hope with your big plans/And now you drag me with your slack/I'm sure you just have some things to work out in your mind/But I don't want to waste your time” in Last Goodbye, you feel like you should offer up your shoulder for him to lean on. Therein lies some of Mr. Sharpe's charm: He comes across as the cool guy down the hall in college who would strum his guitar while everyone shared a beer; when he feels down, you want to take him in and offer up the same comfort he once gave you.

While the 15 tracks may be a touch too many, there is little to skip over. Standouts include the aforementioned Long Island Sound, and the gorgeous tunes Santa Cruz and Secret (featured in the critically acclaimed independent film, *The Rest Of Your Life*).

To his credit, Sharpe crafts the kinds of songs that make you stop and listen. Though it may not change the world we live in, *The Usual Stories & Usual Lies* does herald the arrival of a fresh new voice. With this kind of auspicious opening act, it appears that Sharpe will be a “secret” no longer, and should be making great music for many more years to come.

Do yourself a favor and let Sharpe bend your ear for a while, you'll be better for it.

Greg Rolnick
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