

Beautifully Crafted

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and an "early music" scholar. To some extent, he creates his own bad luck with arrogance, thoughtlessness, and impulsive decisions; a bitter former lover remarks that he is like "King Midas's idiot brother" because "everything you touch turns to shit."

But not when he performs. His voice carries a pure soulfulness that could break your heart, and his renditions of sorrowful old ballads surge from a genuine place.

One especially telling scene contains the contradiction that plagues him. Having traveled all the way from New York to seek out a Chicago producer who might be able to boost his prospects, he asks for an audition and is invited to sing something that demonstrates what is "inside Llewyn Davis" (as his non-selling album promises to deliver.) He chooses to sing

"The Death of Queen Jane," a bleak old tune about a woman's death in childbirth, which he delivers with wistful sweetness, leaving a bit of his soul on the empty stage. The producer responds, "I don't see a lot of money here." Davis doesn't connect with audiences enough to make it as a front man, in his estimation.

Davis accepts this pronouncement stoically. His surliness and thoughtlessness looks different in this light somehow. Did he sabotage the audition with his choice of song, by insisting on his melancholy vision without regard to the audience he had before him, not to mention the audience he seeks? Was he being admirable, or foolish? How thin is the line between artistic success and artistic failure?

Llewyn Davis is frequently unlikeable. The loss of his singing partner to suicide lingers over the film (their duet, played early on, is

the best cut on the soundtrack) and, no longer "comfortable with harmony," Davis resists suggestions that he join a group where he would not be the front man. But his single-mindedness of purpose would appear to be essential in a successful artist -- that is, one who sold enough music to more than "just exist."

The Coens have built a film around a person who is both mad-deningly flawed and gloriously gifted, sometimes in the same moment. They invite you to wonder about all the talent that has gone uncelebrated, and about what we choose to celebrate.

Like all their films, this one is full of wry humor. There is a cat who leads Davis on the film's weeklong journey and for whom he shows more concern and more heartlessness than any other character. And there is an array of vivid characters, including that bitter but calculating ex-lover (Carey Mulligan); her clueless but commercially savvy husband and singing partner (a

convincingly goofy Justin Timberlake); a caustic jazz musician (John Goodman) and his taciturn beat-poet manservant, with whom Davis travels to Chicago; and the kindly upper-West Side sociology professor and his wife who are always ready to offer Davis food and a place to crash.

The Coens' vision is typically termed cynical, even merciless -- but I love their wry observations about humans and their many contradictions. And I can't think of when they have managed a tone of such wistfulness.

Best of all, there is the music. T-Bone Burnett has assembled a collection of songs that beautifully evoke the period, and most of the songs are performed whole by the

actors. It's a kind of survey of the various spots folk musicians staked out in the late 1950s/early 1960s, mostly melancholy tunes emphasizing voice and guitar. Even the narrative structure of the film resembles these old songs -- the same episode, with slight variations in perspective, begins and ends the film, with a sweet and mournful journey in between. The songs carry the best of these humans, including what's inside Llewyn Davis.

Darleen Ortega is a judge on the Oregon Court of Appeals and the first woman of color to serve in that capacity. Her movie review column *Opinionated Judge* appears regularly in *The Portland Observer*. You can find her movie blog at opinionatedjudge.blogspot.com.

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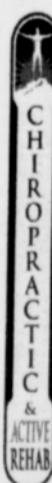
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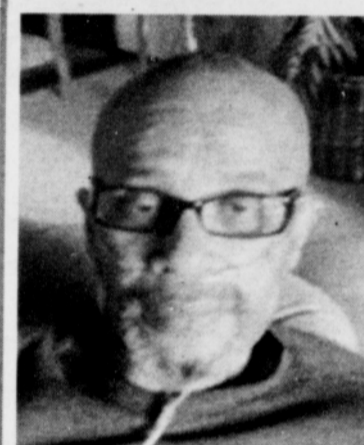
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Dear Friends:



I am coming to you today on behalf of my brother, Mark Brock.

He suffers from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). His lungs are failing and he is unable to do many things that most of us take for granted. Mark's doctors at University of Washington Medical Center have told us that his only option is a life-saving double lung transplant.

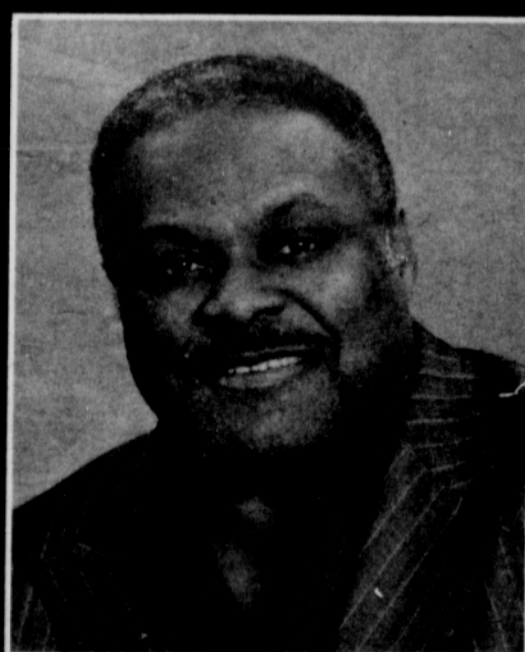
Which brings me to the purpose of this letter, not only is a transplant major surgery, it is also extremely expensive. Even with insurance, there are many expenses that are not covered and must be paid out of pocket. He will be on a life-time of anti-rejection medications. Mark will need to travel from Portland to Seattle and relocate for at least 3 months at the time of his transplant. This is where your help is desperately needed.

To help ease this financial burden, a fundraising campaign in Mark's honor has been established with HelpHOPELive, a nonprofit organization that has been assisting the transplant community for 30 years. All donations are tax-deductible, are held by HelpHOPELive in the Northwest Lung Transplant Fund, and are administered by them for transplant-related expenses only. So please consider making a donation today.

On behalf of Mark and our family, thank you for your kindness, generosity, support and prayers; Thank you, Kristina Booker, 503-281-6092

Please send donations to: **HelpHOPELive**
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Make checks payable to: **HelpHOPELive**. Note in memo section: for Mark Brock; For credit card donations, please call 800.642.8399 or visit helpholive.org and enter Mark Brock in the "Find a Patient" box on the home page.



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