FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

While We've Still Got Feet: New Poems
David Budbill
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“Yak. Yak. Yak. / All these intellectuals ever want to do is talk. / They think words will get them somewhere,” writes this poet, playing with the ironic concept that while a poet must use words, he is aware that the words may be meaningless. Inspired by the Chinese and Japanese reclusive poets Han Shan and Ryokan, among others, Budbill brings a post-modern American disposition to the ancient contemplation of the ephemerality of the seasons, love, and life.

Budbill’s humorous genius lies in his ability to elevate his self-deprecating voice to a universal pitch wherein the reader recognizes the frailty of pride, arrogance, and desire; his poems are rife with irony and his control of the reader’s expectations and sentiments ensure sympathy. Budbill’s meditations take on an “everyman” sensibility as he considers the classic conceits of work, death, and fleeting contentment: “Judevine Mountain was set free to continue on his mountainside / raising vegetables, cutting firewood, talking to the birds and making / poems, which he is doing to this very day, in his nonexistent sort of way.”

The author of seven previous books of poems, seven plays, two CDs, one novel, and one book of short stories, Budbill writes in a voice beguiling in its simple diction and form. His voice, like that of the ancient poets he echoes and emulates, speaks with a restrained passion even when his subject is politics: “Why do so many people have to suffer and die just because / the Emperor and his Imperial Court have an idea?” This restraint, found throughout these 125 poems, places him in the company of such American poets as Kenneth Rexroth, Gary Snyder, and Wendell Berry. His poems deal directly with subjects many other poets cloak in poetical devices, and this directness makes Budbill’s poems accessible and moving. For example, his photographic realistic approach in “Love Song”—“see how the flesh under her upper arm / where her triceps is or was—how it hangs loose and flaps as / she moves her arm”—reveals his sensitivity to the precious fragility of being.

Poems dealing with growing old and the loss of youth and virility are not for the weak of heart or mind. Budbill’s straightforward insistence on facing truth with a Buddhist or Taoist perspective, accompanied by the spirits of the greatest poets of the Asian meditative hermetic

tradition, make the poems ultimately refreshing. This is a perfect book for a quiet evening with a cup of tea while a storm rages outside, when the house shudders in the gusts, and one is aware of how darkness fills the windows. “I pause in this moment at the beginning of my old age / and I say a prayer of gratitude for getting to this evening, // a prayer for being here, today, now, alive / in this life, in this evening, under this sky.”