

Mark Erelli - Biography

Mark Erelli was born Boston, Massachusetts in 1974 and raised in the West Boston suburb of Reading. He performed in numerous high school musicals and formed his first band, Freddie and Slip. Later school bands included Dead Flowers and Organic Ice Cube. Mark wrote his first song "Hell In the Sky" when a member of Dead Flowers. His teenage adoration of rock bands receded when he discovered the music of Jackson Browne, Eagles, James Taylor and subsequently, John Gorka, Greg Browne and Bill Morrissey. Erelli attended Bates College in Lewiston, Maine where he performed covers and the occasional Erelli original in local coffee-houses. Later he formed the first version of the Mark Erelli Band and cut a four-song tape and then a full album, respectively titled "**Words Unspoken**" and "**Long Way From Heaven.**" The album, cut in Lewiston, was released in 1997 when Mark took a gap year.

Relocating to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in the summer of 1997, Mark graduated two years later with a Masters degree in Organismic and Evolutionary Biology. During his time at Amherst, Erelli performed regularly in Boston and New York songwriter clubs. By this stage he had decided that following graduation he would attempt a career as a full-time musician. While attending the North East Folk Alliance Conference in 1997, Erelli met Mark Thayer of the Signature Sounds Recording Company. Mark recorded a number of demos for the Whately, Massachusetts based imprint that winter, and subsequently signed a recording contract with them. His self-titled debut album for the label, cut in the winter of 1998, was released the following Spring just as Mark graduated from Amherst. In May 1999, Mark Erelli was one of the six winners of the annual Kerrville Folk Festival New Folk Songwriters Contest.

In February 2001, Signature Sounds released Erelli's "**Compass And Companion.**" The album went on to spend ten weeks in the Top Ten of the American Chart, and Mark was later nominated for two Boston Music Awards. Both Signature Sounds albums contained material that, I have no doubt, will become well known in the roots music field in years to come. What's more, Erelli is one of the finest live performers currently *working in corners* in America's songwriter listening clubs. Following 9/11 Mark issued a now out-of-print five song E.P. titled "**The Only Way**" that led with his song of the same name and featured two other non-album cuts. His stunning third album "**The Memorial Hall Recordings**" was recorded during three and a half days of sessions held at the village hall in Monson, Mass. The sessions were also filmed and a DVD release was planned, but has yet to materialise. The audio CD, issued in early 2002, included clips from the aforementioned film, featured a quartet of Erelli penned originals, plus his arrangement of the traditional "The Drinking Gourd," while the remaining cuts – *by way of being a tribute* - were *mainly* written by New England based song scribes.

In early 2004 the appropriately titled "**Hillbilly Pilgrim,**" his fourth Signature Sounds album, found Erelli exploring, and experimenting with, western swing rhythms, aided by Boston based country band, The Spurs, and Mark's *ever present* right hand man, Lorne Entress. Following three straight Entress productions, "**Hillbilly Pilgrim**" was co-produced by Mark and Lorne, and featured ten Erelli originals, plus a co-write with his wife Polly, and Clarence Gibson's "Troubles (Those Lonesome Kind)." A couple of months earlier, in the Fall of 2003, the Vance Gilbert/Ellis Paul *covers* collection "**Side Of The Road**" kicked off with Mark's "The Only Way." Since early 2001, a rare track has been available as a full MP3 download on a monthly basis at Mark's web site - <http://www.markerelli.com/music.html>

Mark's "**Hope And Other Casualties**" was released by Signature Sounds in early March 2006. For number of years Mark has been a member of Lori McKenna's road band and has undertaken a number of national tours with her. "**Innocent When You Dream**" was a collection of lullabies and love songs that Erelli originally recorded to give to friends and family as a seasonal gift. The disc features solo acoustic performances of Erelli originals and covers of songs penned by Tom Waits, Shawn Colvin and Townes Van Zandt. Erelli funded the recording of "**Delivered**" by successfully seeking investors from among his fan base. The album, produced by Zack Hickman [of Josh Ritter's band], was released by Signature Sounds in early September 2008.

Discography : "**Long Way From Heaven**" self-release CD [1997] ; "**Mark Erelli**" [1999] ; "**Compass & Companion**" [2000] ; "**The Memorial Hall Recordings**" [2002] ; "**Hillbilly Pilgrim**" [2004] ; "**Hope And Other Casualties**" [2006] ; "**Innocent When You Dream**" [2006] ; "**Delivered**" [2008] :

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikle 07/01, 04/02, 12/03, 01/06 & 07/08.

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